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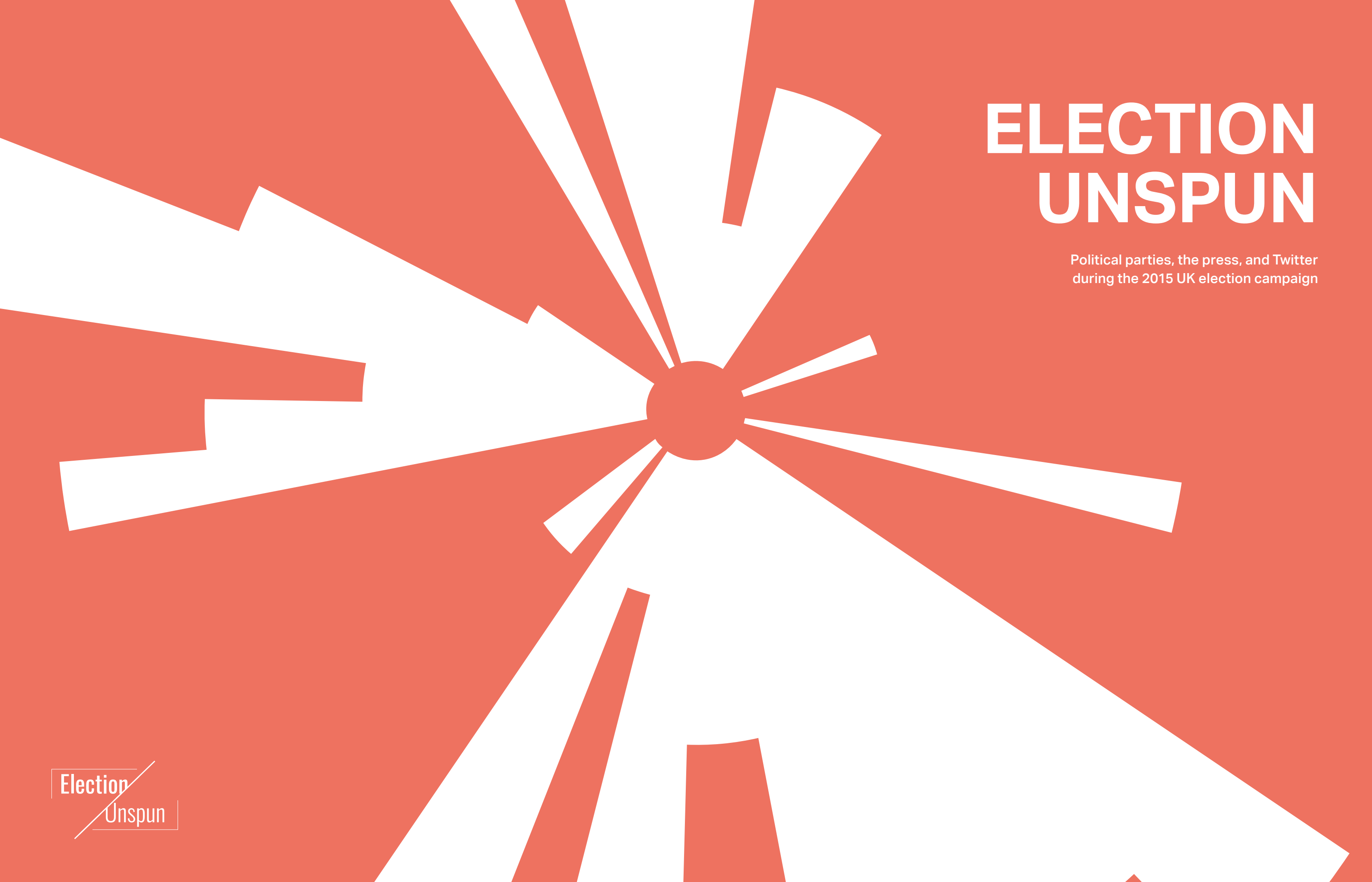
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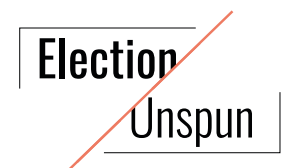


ELECTION UNSPUN

Political parties, the press, and Twitter
during the 2015 UK election campaign

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Standards Trust and the Policy Institute at King’s with
support from eBay Inc.

Unless otherwise stated all mainstream media and
Twitter charts are based on all articles from 16 UK
national online news outlets and tweets from 3,290
political actors and influencers from 30 March –
6 May 2015.



INTRODUCTION

Until the eve of the vote itself we were told the 2015 UK General Election would be the closest in a generation. Up to the point when the exit poll was released at 10pm on 7 May almost everyone believed, on the basis of extensive polling, that the result would be a hung Parliament.

This was broadly what the parties believed before the official campaign started on Monday 30 May and, again based on polling results, what they believed up until Wednesday 6 May. Despite the carefully laid plans each party prepared (this was the first election in UK history where the date was known years in advance) the polls appeared not to shift in anyone's favour.

This makes the story of the battle to control the election agenda during the campaign all the more fascinating. The apparent closeness meant that the smaller parties played a greater role than they had in previous contests. It led politicians to respond to perceived shifts in popular sentiment (like David Cameron becoming passionate). It led to a fixation with coalition deals in the press.

This report charts how the parties, the press, and political influencers sought to define the territory on which the election was fought, and how the parties responded when their detailed plans did not seem to work out.

Using data gathered during the campaign – upwards of 170,000 articles in traditional media and over a million tweets – this report examines the inter-relationship between the parties, traditional media, and social media over the official campaign, from 30 March to 6 May.

It captures the issues that were covered in traditional media and debated by political actors and influencers on Twitter – including the degree to which their two agendas coincided.

On both Twitter and traditional media, the report identifies themes that defined the campaign, such as the personalisation of coverage of the party leaders; the participation of the press, and the way in which the economy dominated the debate. It then contrasts these with the issues everyone expected to dominate debate but did not, such as the NHS and immigration.

It also looks at the political actors themselves – the candidates – and how they were using media to promote themselves and their policies. 397 Conservative candidates and 566 Labour candidates were tweeting during the campaign, as well as LibDems, Greens, and candidates from UKIP, the SNP and Plaid Cymru. All their tweets were captured and analysed for this report.

The 2015 election campaign was played out in the media to an extent not seen before – broadcast, press, online, blogs, and social media all featured both discussion of party policies and commentary on the 'horse race' of the campaign. Yet it was also a highly controlled campaign in which Parties, particularly the Conservatives, sought tight control of the debate. This report looks at how this played out.

METHODOLOGY

Over the course of the 2015 UK General Election campaign we collected online media content (text) from the national press and broadcasters, from political actors and influencers on Twitter, and from the political parties themselves.

NATIONAL PRESS AND BROADCASTERS

From the national press and broadcasters we collected the text from every article published online from sixteen news outlets from 5 January 2015 through to midnight on the 6 May, the day before the election:

- BBC: bbc.co.uk/news
- ITV: itv.com/news
- Channel 4: channel4.com/news
- Sky News: news.sky.com
- The Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday: dailymail.co.uk
- The Sun: thesun.co.uk
- The Daily Express and Sunday Express: express.co.uk
- The Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror and Sunday People: mirror.co.uk
- The Daily Star and Daily Star Sunday: dailystar.co.uk
- The Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph: telegraph.co.uk
- The Times: thetimes.co.uk and Sunday Times: thesundaytimes.co.uk
- The Financial Times: ft.com
- The Independent and Independent on Sunday: independent.co.uk
- The Guardian and Observer: theguardian.com/uk
- The Huffington Post UK: huffingtonpost.co.uk
- BuzzFeed UK: buzzfeed.com/uk

This added up to about 30,000 articles each week. We then removed all articles that had no relevance to UK politics or public policy. We did this by removing certain sections of content (e.g. sport, recipes, crosswords) which we knew included no coverage of UK politics. This left us with around 7,000 articles each week to analyse.

To analyse these articles we tagged each of them based on their content. For example, we tagged any article that mentioned a Party Leader, or a Party, or a senior politician. We also tagged every policy mentioned within each article. We did this using the Ipsos-MORI Issues Index. This Index consists of a list of the 36 most important political issues facing the country according to the UK public. For our analysis, we have condensed these into 14 categories:

- Immigration
- Education/schools
- EU/Euro
- Transport/Public transport
- Local government/Council tax
- Devolution/Constitutional reform
- Fuel and energy
- Housing
- Welfare
- Crime/Law & order/Justice
- Health/NHS
- Economy
- Defence & Foreign Policy
- Environment

For our analysis of partisanship in the press we manually assessed every leader column and front page lead story in the press from 5 January to the election. For most of the mainstream media analysis we analysed content from the official campaign (30 March to 6 May).

TWITTER

For the period of the official UK election campaign – from 30 March until 6 May 2015 – we collected every tweet published by 3,290 political actors and influencers. Six groups made up these political actors and influencers:

- 1 Parliamentary candidates (incumbents): 460
- 2 Parliamentary candidates (challengers): 1,952
- 3 Political Influencers: 309
- 4 Social Policy Influencers: 268
- 5 Defence Policy Influencers: 150
- 6 Organisations (that publish UK politics news): 151

We collected the tweets using the Twitter public API and a scraping tool that we built called 'Steno'. On average we were collecting around 25,000 tweets per day and over 170,000 tweets per week. In total, over the six week period, we collected more than a million tweets.

We collected the tweets in a structured way in order to analyse them. This meant collecting all the content and metadata available through the API, including: the content of the tweet itself; who published it; the time and date the tweet was published; retweets and favourites; hashtags and shortlinks.

We deliberately chose not to try to use Twitter as a proxy for public opinion, but rather to focus on political actors and influencers who were likely to be important participants in policy debates and who already had large followings. In addition to general political influencers we also chose to analyse

two groups of specialist policy influencers – from highly distinct policy areas – social policy and defence policy.

We identified 460 incumbent Parliamentary candidates with Twitter accounts who were competing in the 2015 election. We discovered 1,952 candidates challenging for seats in the 2015 election (with the help of yournextmp.com).

To identify political influencers we developed a series of criteria: number of tweets; number of followers; number following; Klout score; and content of tweets. We developed these criteria both inductively (ie through observation, through analysis of existing tweets on political topics and hashtags, and through analysis of dialogue and reference to authority), and by correlating this with existing Twitter lists of political influencers, for example from Tweetminster. We then reviewed the list by category to make sure we were not missing important constituencies of people.

Criteria for Political Influencers (PIs) were:

- Minimum of 1,000 tweets
- Minimum of 5,000 followers
- Minimum of 100 following
- Klout score > 55
- Tweets about UK politics

From this we created a list of 309 political influencers.

To construct our list of Social Policy Influencers we worked closely with the Social Care Research Unit at King's, and – as with the Political Influencers list – developed it through careful observation of Twitter activity associated with social policy.

We developed our list of Defence Policy Influencers with the help of a doctoral student in the War Studies department in King's, Thomas Colley, both by research and observation and with reference

to existing Twitter lists on UK foreign policy and defence issues.

Criteria for Social Policy Influencers and Defence Policy Influencers:

- Minimum of 500 tweets
- Minimum of 1,000 followers
- Minimum of 100 following
- Klout score > 40
- Tweets about UK social or defence policy

Based on these criteria and our research we identified 268 Social Policy Influencers and 150 Defence Policy Influencers. The two groups did not overlap.

We also identified organisations that publish news about UK politics. These we divided into: think tanks, centres, universities, campaign groups and news publishers. We only included organisations that were actively broadcasting current news or other content related to UK politics and left out organisations whose Twitter accounts had been silent for quite some time. From this we identified 151 organisations that publish relevant UK politics news.

By focusing on specific types of people and organisations we avoided the difficulty that affects many Twitter analyses. We acknowledge – and fully accept – that this is not a representative sample of the population. Instead, we have made a deliberate choice to concentrate on opinion formers and agenda setters on Twitter.

We tagged every tweet according to the same criteria by which we tagged articles from the national press and broadcasters. For this we developed a dictionary of terms in order to help us describe policy areas or people. For example, when a tweet included the word "NHS", it was tagged as Healthcare but when a tweet talked about "HSBC"

was tagged as Economy. In order to group tweets according to recognized names, specific words, phrases, acronyms, and hashtags, we wrote and applied more than 267 pages of tagging scripts.

POLITICAL PARTIES

In addition to keeping track of the Political Parties agenda via the tweets of Parliamentary Candidates, other political actors, Parties and Party press offices on Twitter, we made an ongoing assessment of Party campaign agendas using openly available information on Party websites, Facebook pages, and YouTube broadcasts.

There were, in total, six researchers working on the collection and analysis of mainstream media, social media, and political party communication over the course of the 2015 UK election campaign.

week

1

OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN
STARTS MONDAY 30
MARCH, WITH THE
LEADERS DEBATE ON
THURSDAY 2 APRIL

The first week is
characteristic of much
of the official 2015
campaign – business and
the economy dominate,
and the focus is on the
leaders themselves

Labour

Conservative

Media

Other

PARTIES

Monday 30 March Tuesday 31 March Wednesday 1 April Thursday 2 April Friday 3 April Saturday 4 April Sunday 5 April

Labour launch business manifesto

Conservatives set goal of 2m more jobs in next Parliament

Miliband zero hours speech in Leeds

Seven Leaders TV Debate

Conservatives warn of £3,000 Labour tax bombshell

PRESS

'Labour Will Raise Tax Bill By £3,000, Says Cameron'
The Times

'They're Off: With Row Over Tax And A Personal Attack'
The Guardian

'Miliband Puts Clampdown On Zero-Hours At Heart Of Policy'
FT

'Labour Fights Back On Tory Business Letter'
The Guardian

'Oops! I [Miliband] Just Lost My Election'
The Sun

'Most Dangerous Woman In Britain [Sturgeon]'
The Daily Mail

'Osborne's Housing Revolution'
The Sunday Telegraph

'George Osborne announces 'Hat trick of good news' as economic recovery strengthens'
The Express

'100 Business Chiefs: Labour Threatens Britain's Recovery'
The Telegraph

'Red Ed's Zero Hours Hypocrisy'
The Daily Mail

'Sturgeon's Secret Backing For Cameron'
The Daily Telegraph

'Tories Best For Workers, Say Voters'
The Sunday Times

TWEETS

'Here's our message to British business today: [link to FT ad]'
@Ed_Miliband

'Hat trick of good news just out from ONS: GDP revised up, consumer confidence up, living standards up. #LongTermEconomic Plan working'
@George_Osborne

'Signatories to today's @Telegraph letter include 29 SMEs and collectively employ over half a million people in UK'
@CCHQPress

'Cameron dodges bullet. Miliband flat. Sturgeon shines. Farage mad. Clegg half decent. Day out for Bennett/Wood'
@MattChorley

'Labour's got a better plan. We will raise the minimum wage'
@LabourPress

'The cost of a Tory Chancellor – households £1100 a year worse off under Tories'
@Ed_Balls

'Sunday Times front page: "Tories best for workers, say voters." Actual poll results: [photo of results]'
@AdamBienkov

'The IFS has debunked David Cameron's claim that Labour would raise taxes by £3,000 http://ind.pn/1HX6XJJ'
@D_Blanchflower

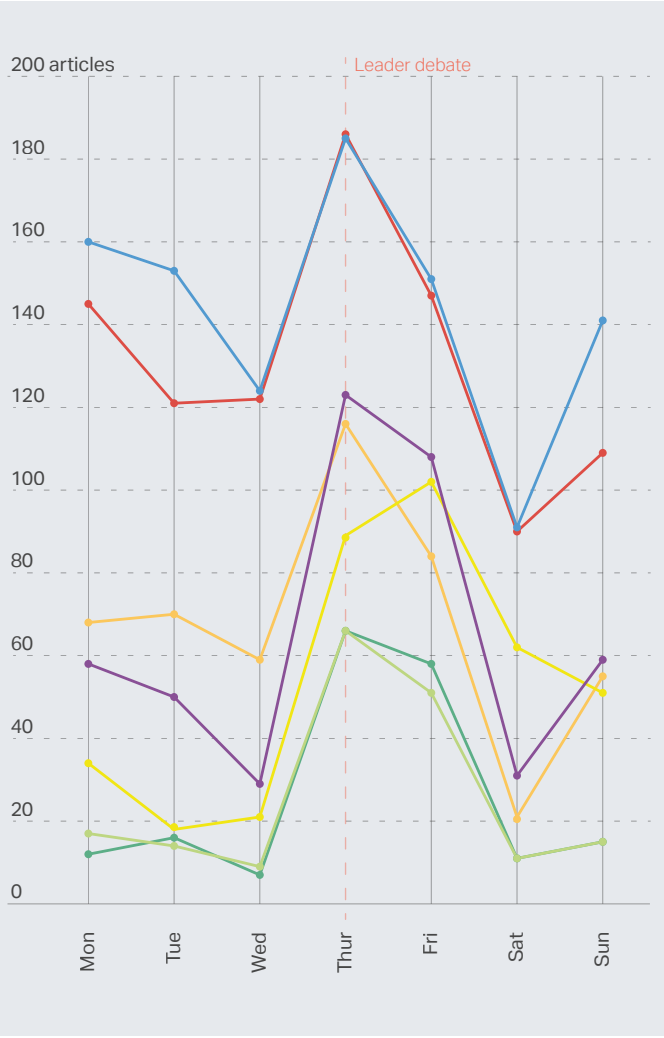
'Viewing Charlotte and Christian's new @Helptobuy home in Clipstone, Nottinghamshire'
@George_Osborne

CAMPAIGN THEME

Personalising the campaign

Both in the press and on Twitter, attention centred on party leaders in the first week and throughout the campaign

Mainstream media

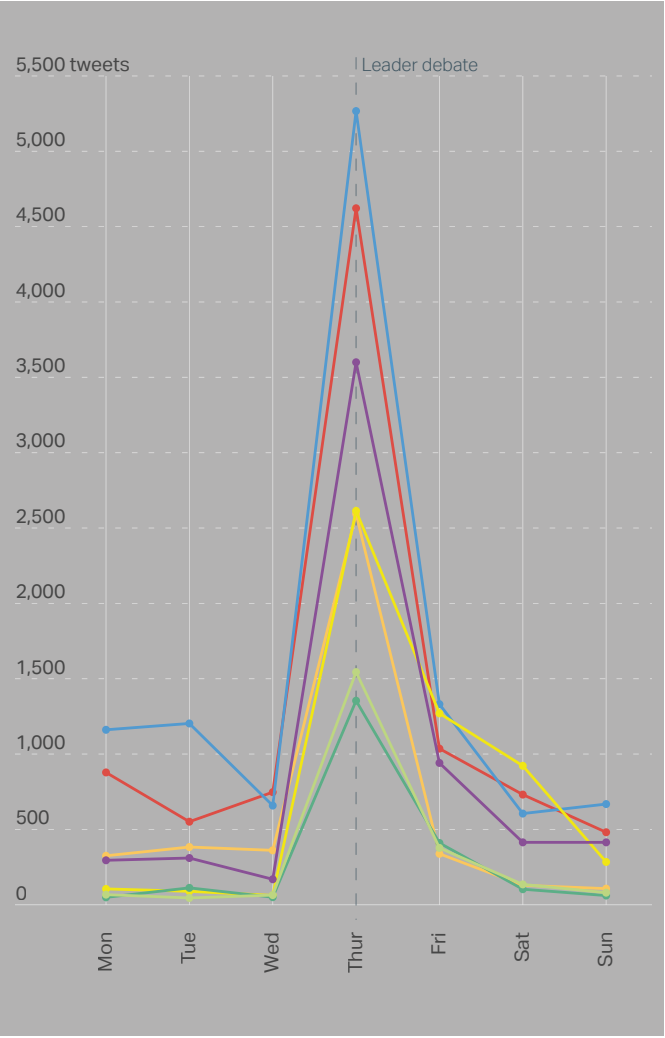


● Labour ● Conservative ● Lib Dem ● UKIP ● SNP ● Green ● Plaid Cymru

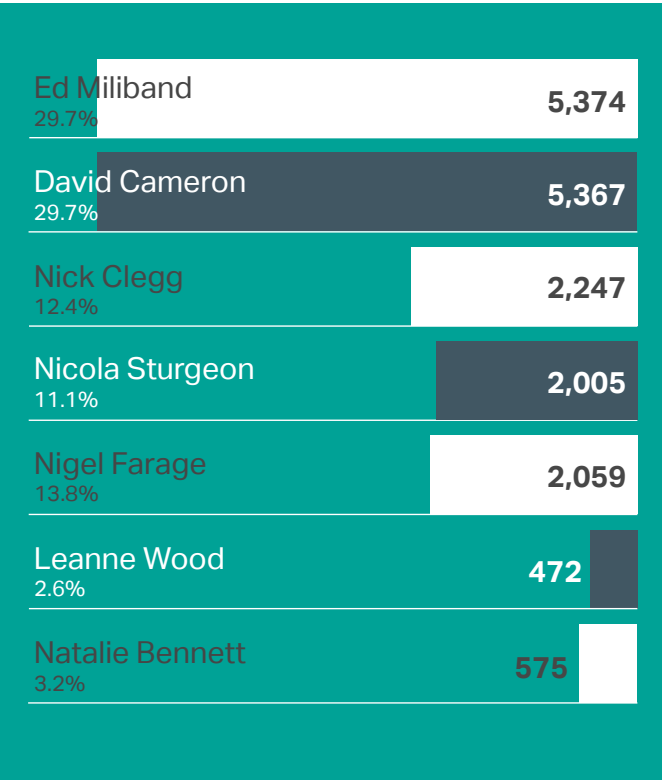
PARTY LEADERS IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA & TWITTER – WEEK ONE

Over 50% of tweets about the leaders in the first week were on the day of the debate. Mentions of Nicola Sturgeon increased by over forty times and then did not drop back to their pre-debate average.

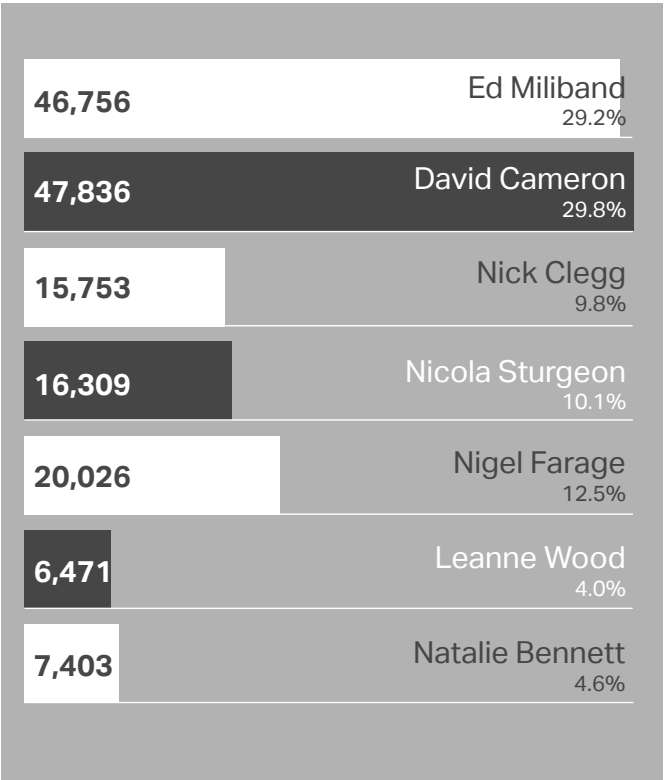
Twitter



Mainstream media



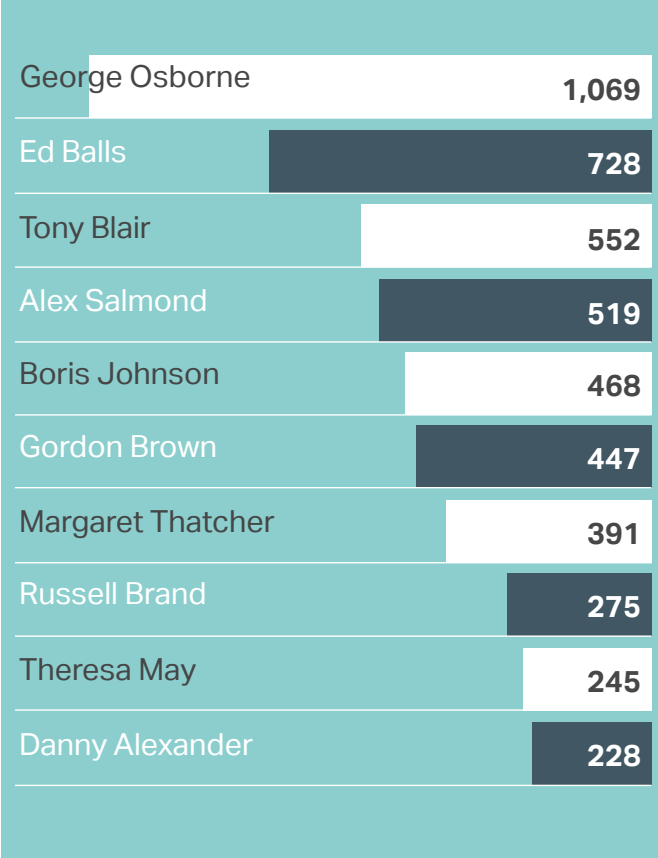
Twitter



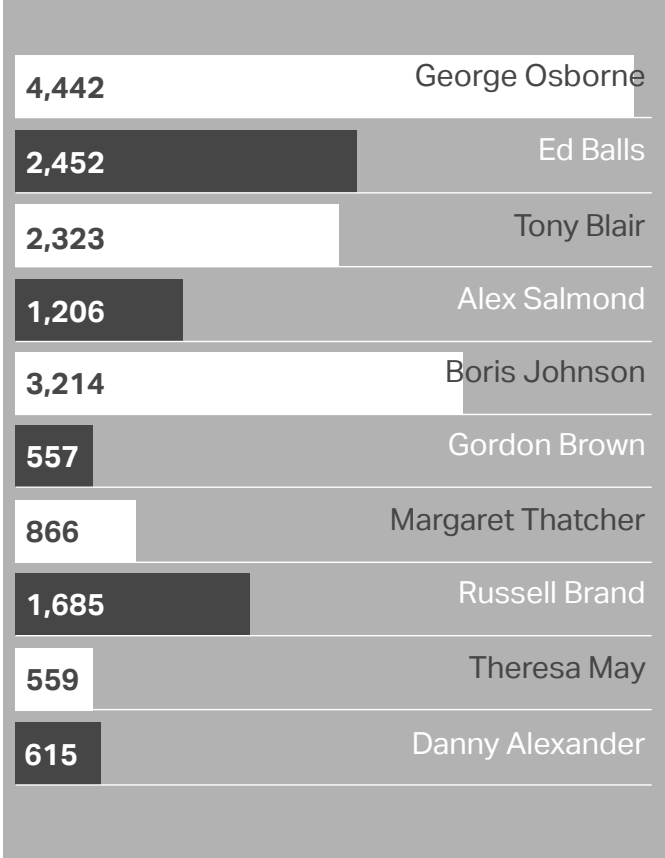
COVERAGE OF PARTY LEADERS

Over the course of the campaign David Cameron and Ed Miliband each received 30% of the coverage – on both mainstream media and amongst political actors and influencers on Twitter.

Mainstream media



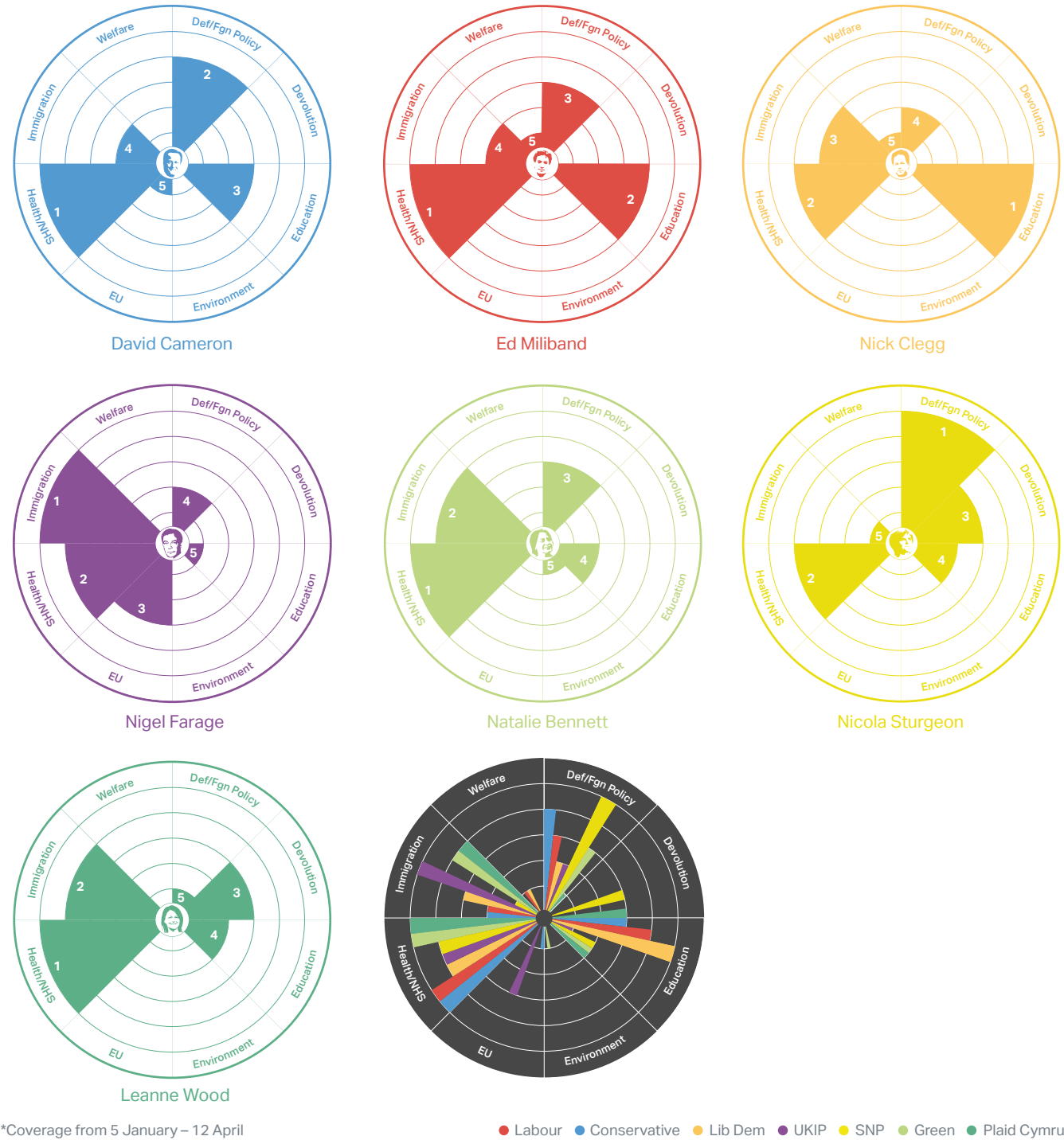
Twitter



COVERAGE OF OTHER
POLITICAL FIGURES

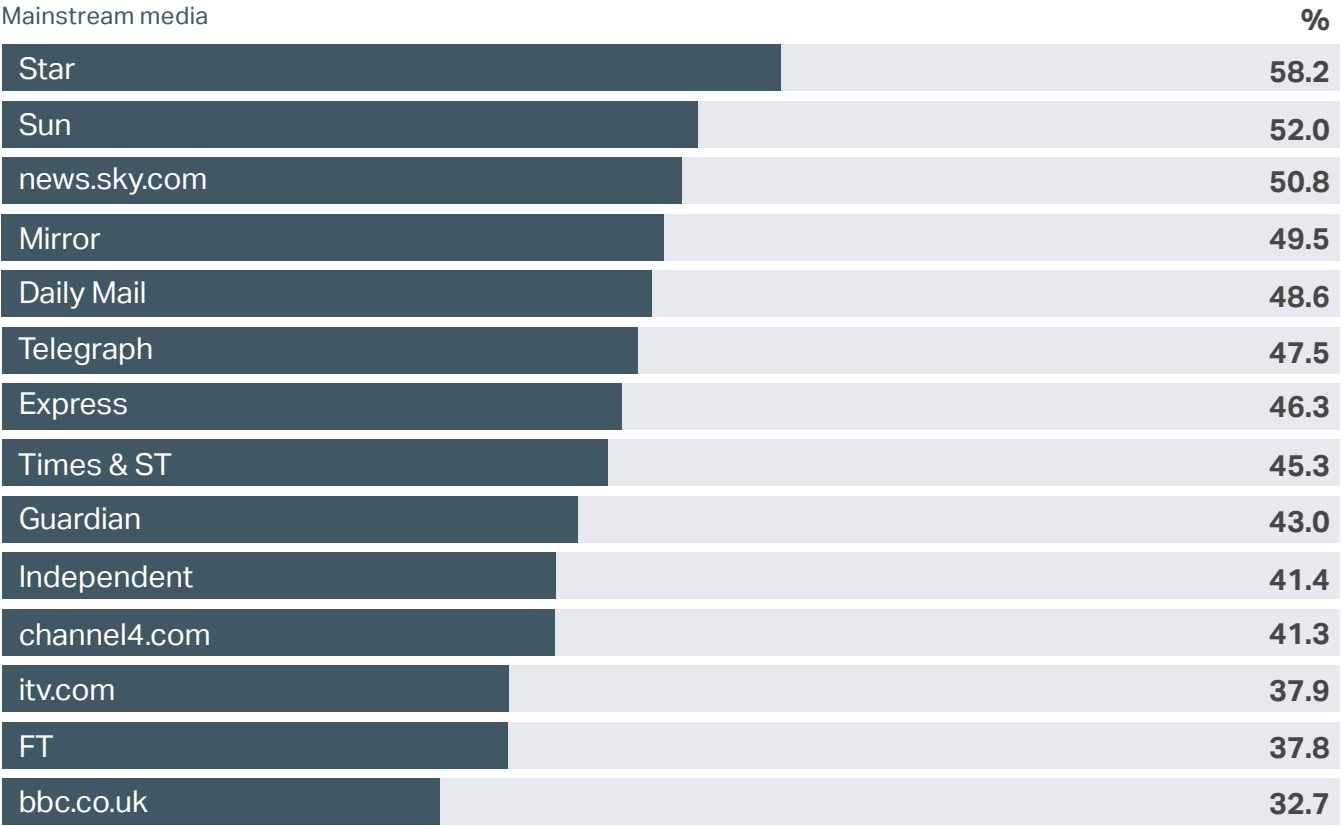
George Osborne received almost 50% more coverage on mainstream media than any other politician. He was also mentioned most amongst the Twitter actors and influencers, though more closely followed by Boris Johnson.

Mainstream media



LEADERS AND TOPICS

In mainstream media articles, all party leaders were most associated with the economy. After that, David Cameron and Ed Miliband were most associated with health, as were Natalie Bennett and Leanne Wood. Nick Clegg was most associated with education, Nigel Farage with immigration, and Nicola Sturgeon with defence/foreign policy.



*Percentage of articles mentioning parties that also mention their leaders
Coverage from 5 January – 12 April

PERSONALISATION OF LEADERS
IN THE PRESS

From January 5 to April 12, *the Daily Star*, *the Sun* and Sky News have had the most personalised coverage of political parties. Reading 58% of articles in *the Daily Star* that mentioned a political party also referred to the leader. In *the Sun* 52% of articles that mentioned a party also mentioned its leader.

week

2

WEEK TWO WAS DOMINATED – AS WERE MOST WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN – BY DEBATE ABOUT THE ECONOMY

Labour briefly captured the agenda with Ed Miliband’s non-doms announcement on the Wednesday. By the weekend the Conservatives had regained the initiative in the press with their commitment to cut inheritance tax

Labour

Conservative

Media

Other

PARTIES

PRESS

TWEETS

Monday 6 April

Tuesday 7 April

Wednesday 8 April

Thursday 9 April

Friday 10 April

Saturday 11 April

Sunday 12 April

Osborne hails ‘Pensions Freedoms day’

Cameron tours all four UK nations in a day

Miliband non-dom speech at Warwick University

George Osborne commits to 3m new apprenticeships in next Parliament

Conservatives pledge £8bn for NHS

Labour commit to 3,000 more midwives

Conservatives pledge to cut inheritance tax on homes

Ed Balls’ speech on ‘tax cuts for millions not millionaires’

Tony Blair Sedgefield speech

Scottish Leaders Debate (BBC Scotland)

‘Michael Fallon on ‘backstabber’ Miliband

Labour launch Crime & Justice manifesto

Labour pledges war on tax avoidance

‘Skint Families Have To Be DIY Dentists’
The Mirror

‘Blair goes into battle to fight for Miliband – and the EU’
The I

‘Miliband Vow To Ban Rules That Make UK “A Tax Haven For The Rich”’
The FT

”“Backstabber” Miliband Attacked Over Trident’
The Times

‘Tories Freeze Rail Fairs As Labour Edges Ahead’
The Times

‘Tories Pledge Extra £8bn A Year For NHS’
The Guardian

‘Tories: Give £1m To Your Children Tax-Free’
The Daily Mail

‘Miliband Raids Rich In Purge Of Non-Doms’
The Times

‘Labour Tax Plan To Spark Exodus’
The Telegraph

‘Inheritance Tax Slashed By Tories’
The Sunday Telegraph

‘More than 140 top doctors attack government record on NHS’
The Guardian

‘Blair’s Toxic Embrace’
The Daily Mail

‘So not only is @TheSunNewspaper flat out for Cameron, it’s trying to force the BBC to follow its agenda. Crazy days
<http://t.co/0DIfHOyaxD>’
@peterjukes

‘Blair steps into campaign today with EU warning; Cameron campaigning in scot/eng/Wales and N Ireland; Lab campaigning on GP access’
@BBCLauraK

‘Desperate Tories all over the place trying to justify their unjustifiable opposition to non doms policy’
@LabourPress

‘Michael Fallon – Verdict from the Twitter commentariat – <http://t.co/SbBX3zxwAD> – In a word, damning, and not just from lefties’
@AndrewSparrow

‘@Conservatives committed to increasing #health spending in real terms by a minimum of £8 billion in next Parliament’
@CCHQPress

‘It’s natural to want to pass the home you worked so hard for onto your children. My video on cutting Inheritance Tax’
@David_Cameron

‘Ed Milliband says he will abolish non-dom status in UK. This gets my vote I never thought any party would have courage to do this’
@DuncanBannatyne

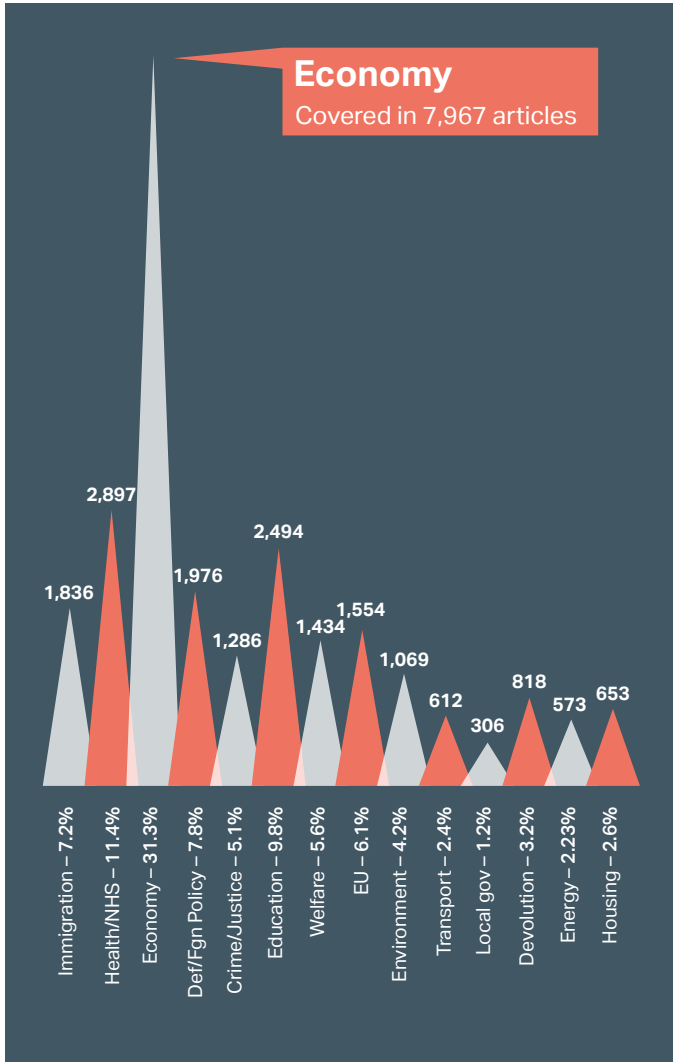
‘To be fair, Michael Fallon’s tactic of getting people to stop talking about non-doms has worked. At great cost to his cred, but still’
@stephentall

‘Cameron can’t say where the money comes from for his NHS plans. In January he said this wld “wreck” the NHS’
@LabourPress

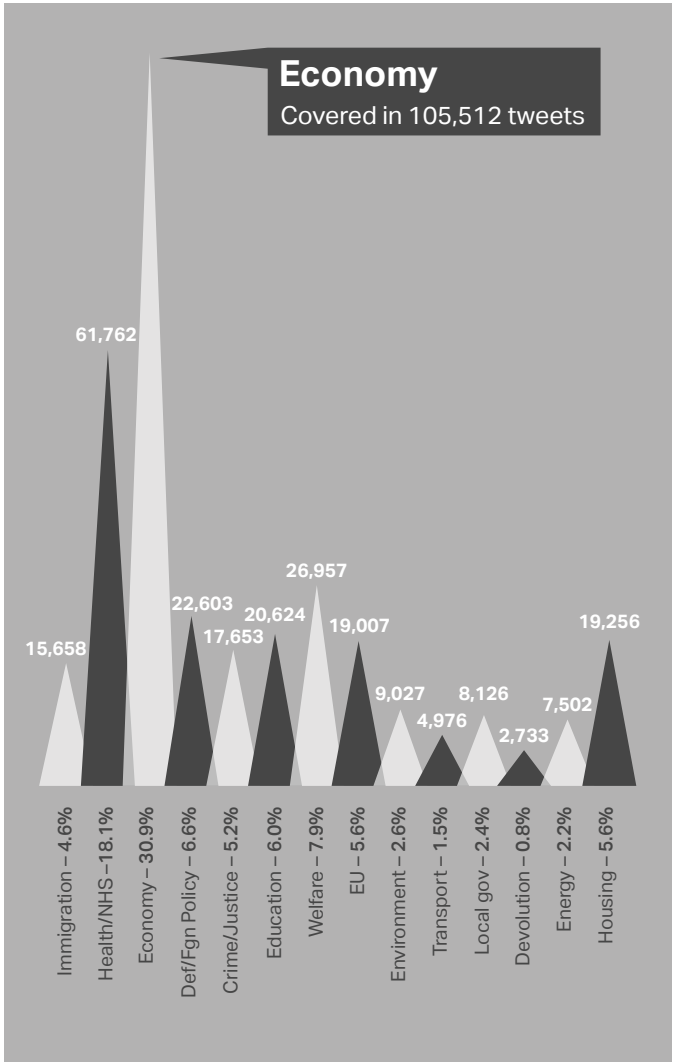
The economy

'It's the economy, stupid.' Throughout the campaign the economy was by far the most covered topic, and the most discussed political issue by candidates and political influencers on Twitter

Mainstream media



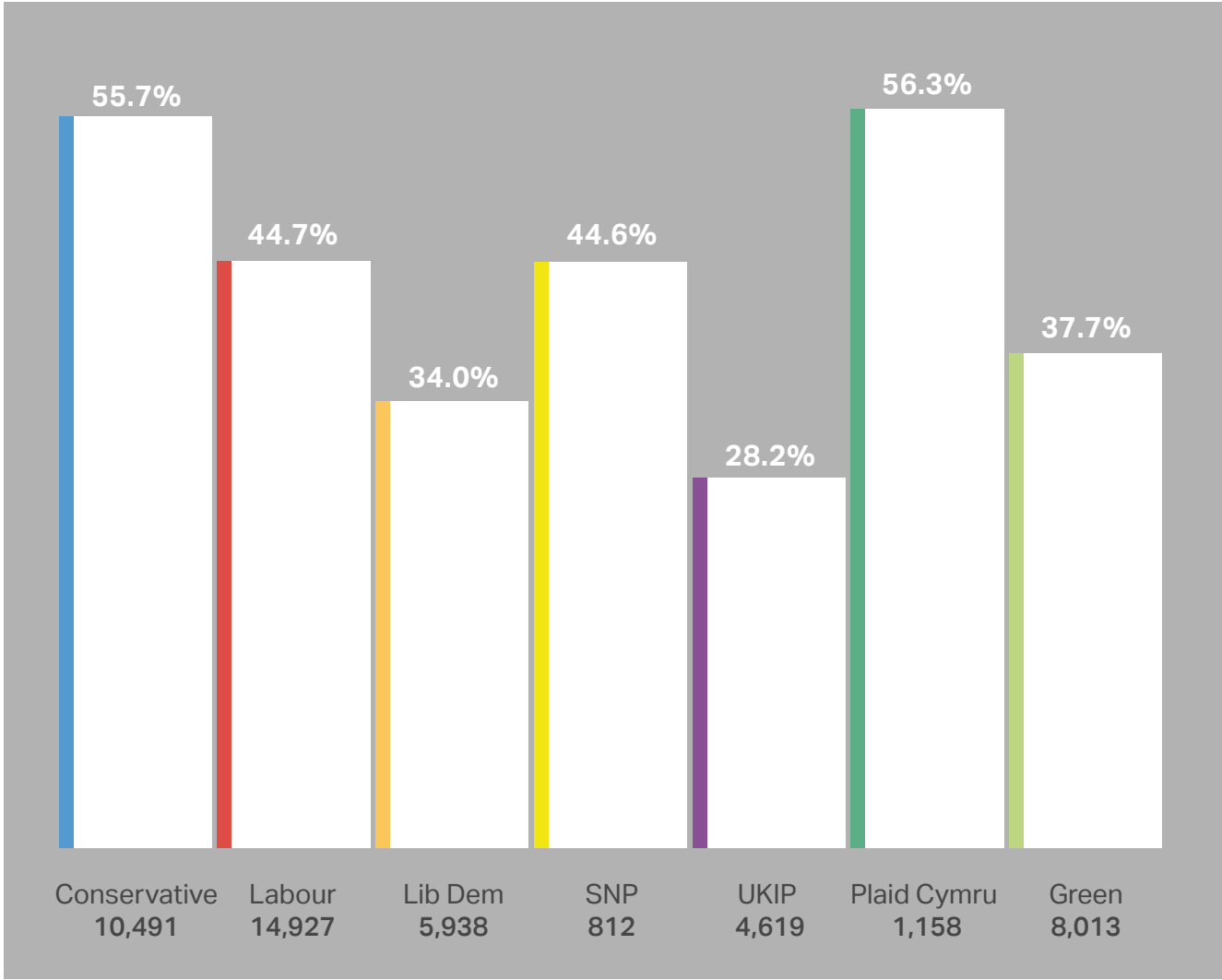
Twitter



COVERAGE OF POLITICAL ISSUES IN THE CAMPAIGN

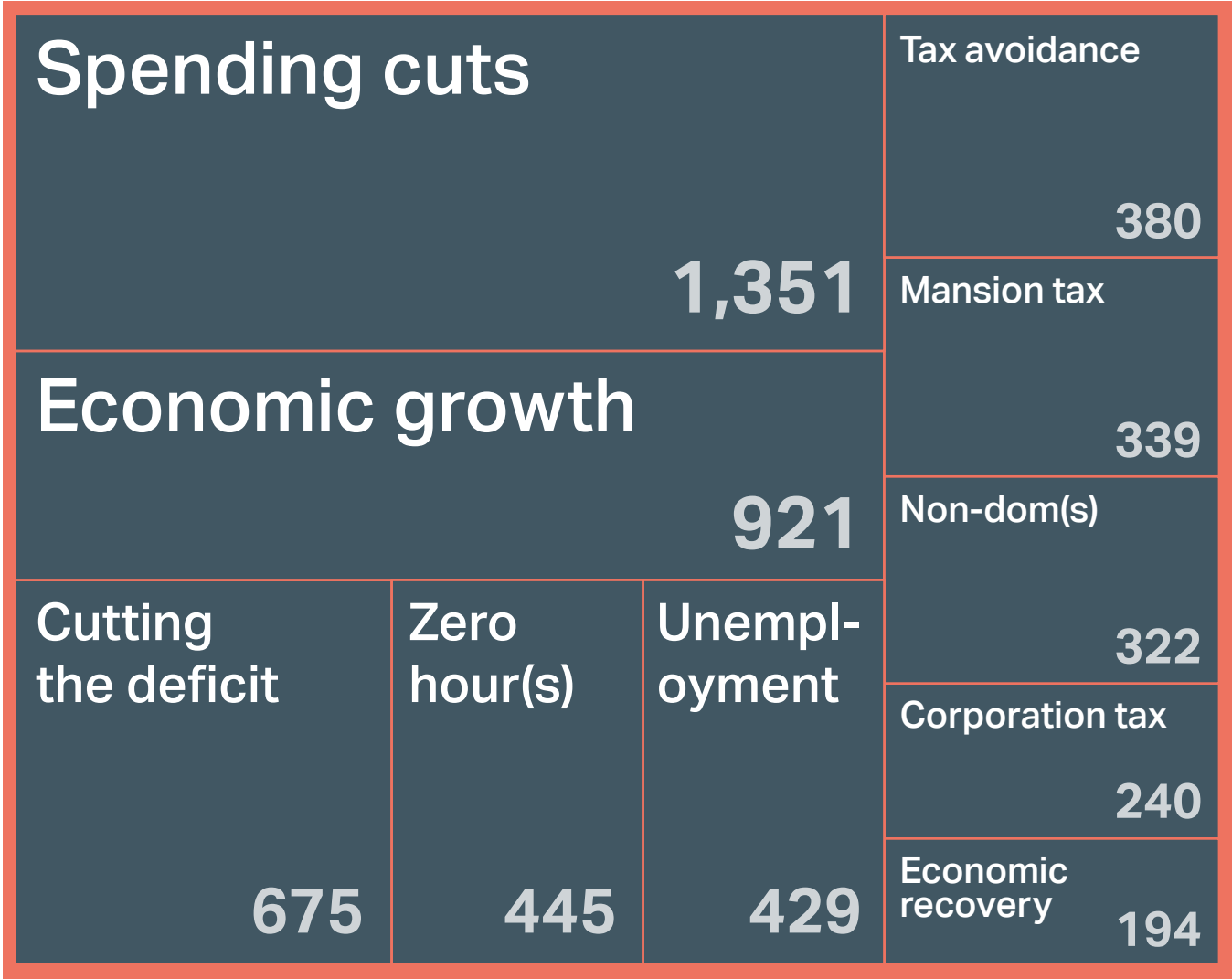
Almost a third of policy debate on mainstream news and Twitter was about the economy. The next most covered policy was healthcare – mentioned in 18% of actor and influencer tweets, though only 11% of mainstream news coverage.

Twitter



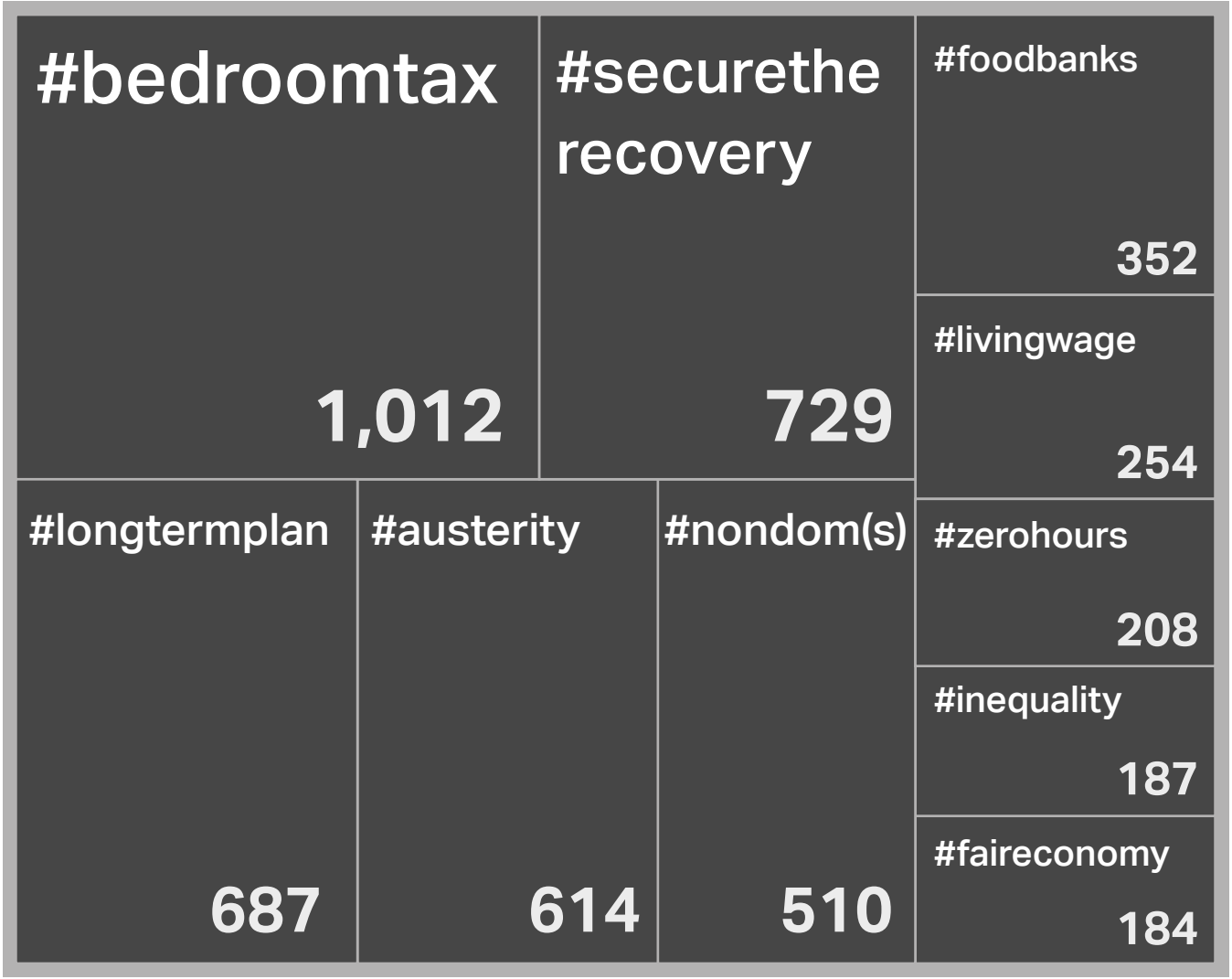
TWEETS ABOUT THE ECONOMY BY PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES

The focus on the economy was even greater amongst Conservative candidates. 55% of their political tweets were about the economy, as compared to 28% of tweets by UKIP candidates.



KEY ISSUES COVERED WITHIN THE ECONOMY (MAINSTREAM MEDIA)

‘Spending cuts’ was the most referenced economic issue every week of the campaign leading up to 7 May, followed by economic growth and cutting the deficit. Behind these were Labour policies on zero hours, mansion tax and non-doms.



POPULAR TWITTER HASHTAGS ABOUT THE ECONOMY

Hashtags about the economy amongst these Twitter users differed from issues covered in mainstream media. #bedroomtax was discussed most amongst political actors and influencers, above Conservative hashtags like #securetherecovery and #longtermplan.

week

3

THE PARTIES
LAUNCHED THEIR
MANIFESTOS IN
WEEK THREE, AND
THE CHALLENGERS
DEBATED ON
THURSDAY 16 APRIL
(WITHOUT CAMERON
OR CLEGG)

As the Parties launched
their manifestos, and
much of the press hailed
the return of Thatcherite
policies, Twitter often
sought to subvert the
Parties’ attempts to
dictate the campaign

- Labour
- Conservative
- Lib Dem
- UKIP
- Media
- Other

PARTIES

PRESS

TWEETS

Monday 13 April Tuesday 14 April Wednesday 15 April Thursday 16 April Friday 17 April Saturday 18 April Sunday 19 April

Labour manifesto launch

Conservative manifesto launch

LibDem manifesto launch

Challengers’ debate

Miliband launches youth manifesto in Lincoln

UKIP manifesto launch

‘My Pledge [Miliband]’
The Mirror

‘Maggie’s “Right To Buy” Dream Is Back’
The Daily Mail

‘Return Of The Good Life’
The Telegraph

‘Cam’s Bribes Will Cost Every Family £1,439 A Year’
The Mirror

‘Why I’m giving £1.3m to UKIP’
The Express

‘Tories Are “Panic-stricken” Says Top Miliband Adviser’
The Guardian

‘£10bn Share Bonanza’
The Sun

‘Labour’s Big Promise: No Extra Borrowing’
The Guardian

‘Cameron Banks On Thatcher’s Legacy’
The Independent

‘Happy Ever Grafter’
The Sun

‘Labour’s Queen of Hypocrisy’
The Daily Mail

‘Join Me Or You’ll Pay, Sturgeon Tells Labour’
The Times

‘Gove Rules Out UKIP Deal’
The Telegraph

‘Boris: This is a Battle for Britain’
The Daily Mail

‘No Ed For Business’
The Sun

‘We Are The True Party of Working People’
The Telegraph

‘Tories Too Right Wing To Win’
The Mirror

‘Rescue boats? I’d use gunships to stop migrants’
Katie Hopkins in *The Sun*

‘Labour’s guarantee: every policy is fully funded with not one requiring additional borrowing
<http://t.co/UTHUtgN6Ra>
@LabourPress

‘The next Conservative govt will make sure more people can enjoy the security of home ownership
#VoteConservative
<http://t.co/2Rxry57UfC>
@CCHQPress

‘Unsure as to whether I’m at a manifesto launch or someone’s birthday party’
@IsabelHardman at LibDem launch

‘Who won the debate? Our Twitter poll results: Sturgeon: 54% Miliband: 20% Farage: 17.5% Wood: 4.5% Bennett: 4%’
@SkyNews

‘Lord Bell on the Tory campaign: “It’s dreadful. It’s risk averse. It’s boring. There is no engagement with real voters. There is no passion”
@LabourPress

‘There is a Battle for Britain next month – and one this country cannot afford to lose: [Facebook] #GE2015’
@BorisJohnson

‘It’s only taken half a day for Tory Right-To-Buy plan to fall apart. If only the newspapers fawning over it had scrutinised it more eh?’
@Sunny_Hundal

‘Weird UKIP press conference where journalists asking critical questions are shouted down by audience, encouraged by party’
@MediaGuido

‘From the crass partisan announcement of #GE2015 to yesterday’s no show by #Cameron the Tory campaign has been woeful. Keep it up Lynton!’
@Redpeter99

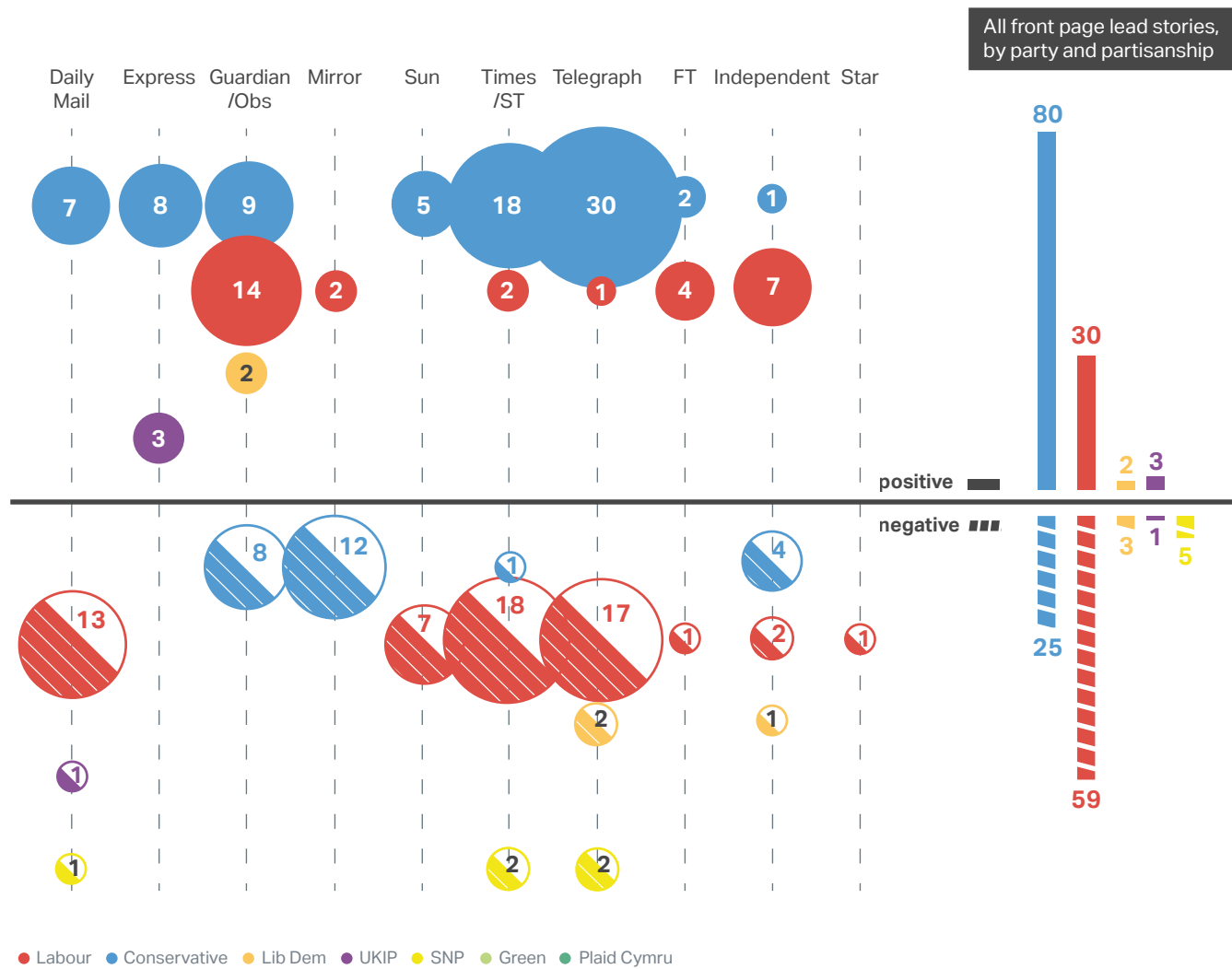
‘Tories: We’re tough on immigration. Labour: We’re tougher! UKIP: We’re the toughest! In unrelated news, 700 migrants drown in Mediterranean’
@davidschneider

CAMPAIGN THEME

Partisanship

Press partisanship was acute throughout the campaign – both in news and leader columns. Twitter partisanship was often characterised by a battle over hashtags

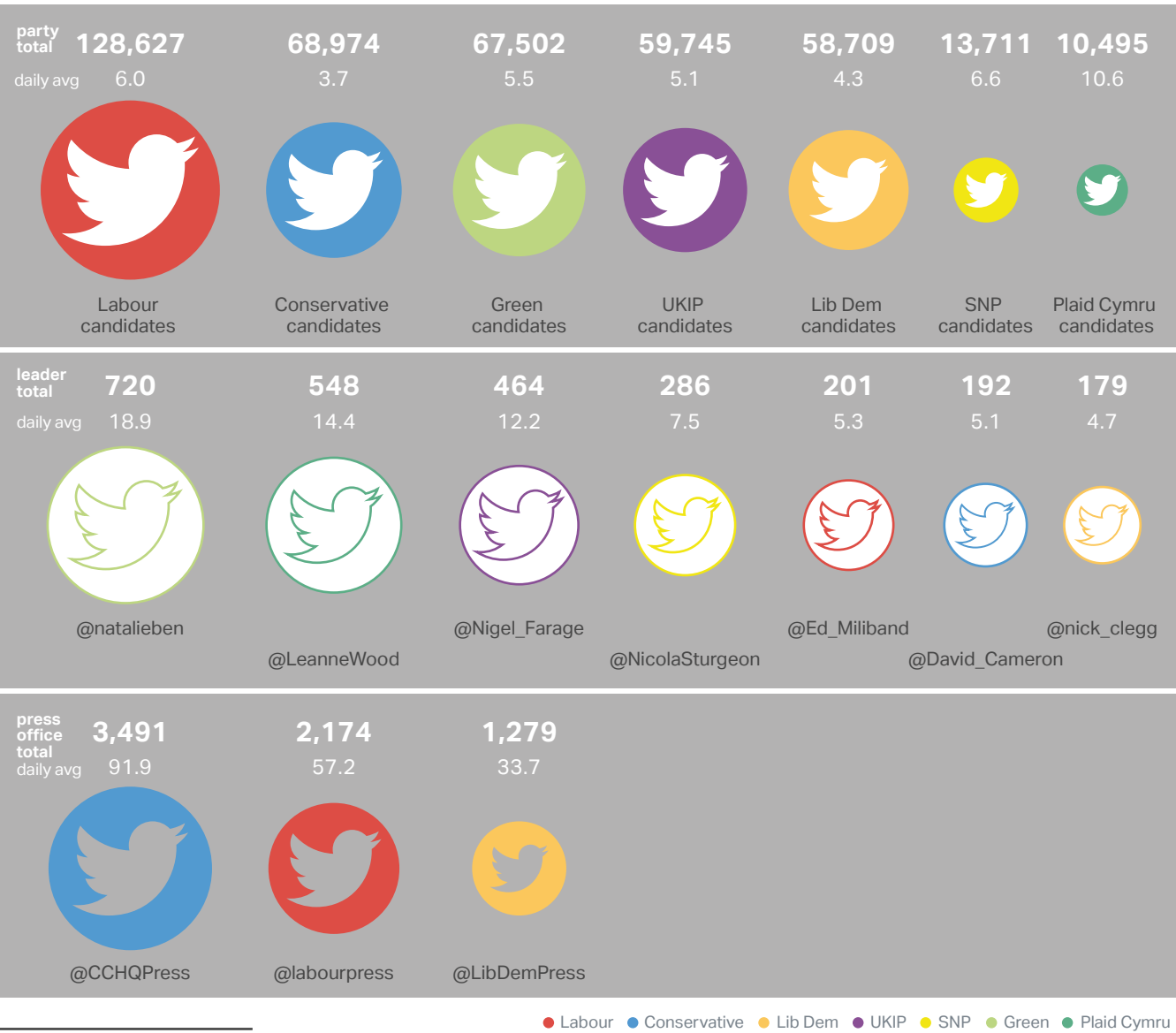
Mainstream media



PARTISANSHIP ON FRONT PAGES

Newspaper front pages were slightly more likely to be positive than negative. The Conservatives received the majority of positive front-page splashes, while stories about Labour were more often negative.

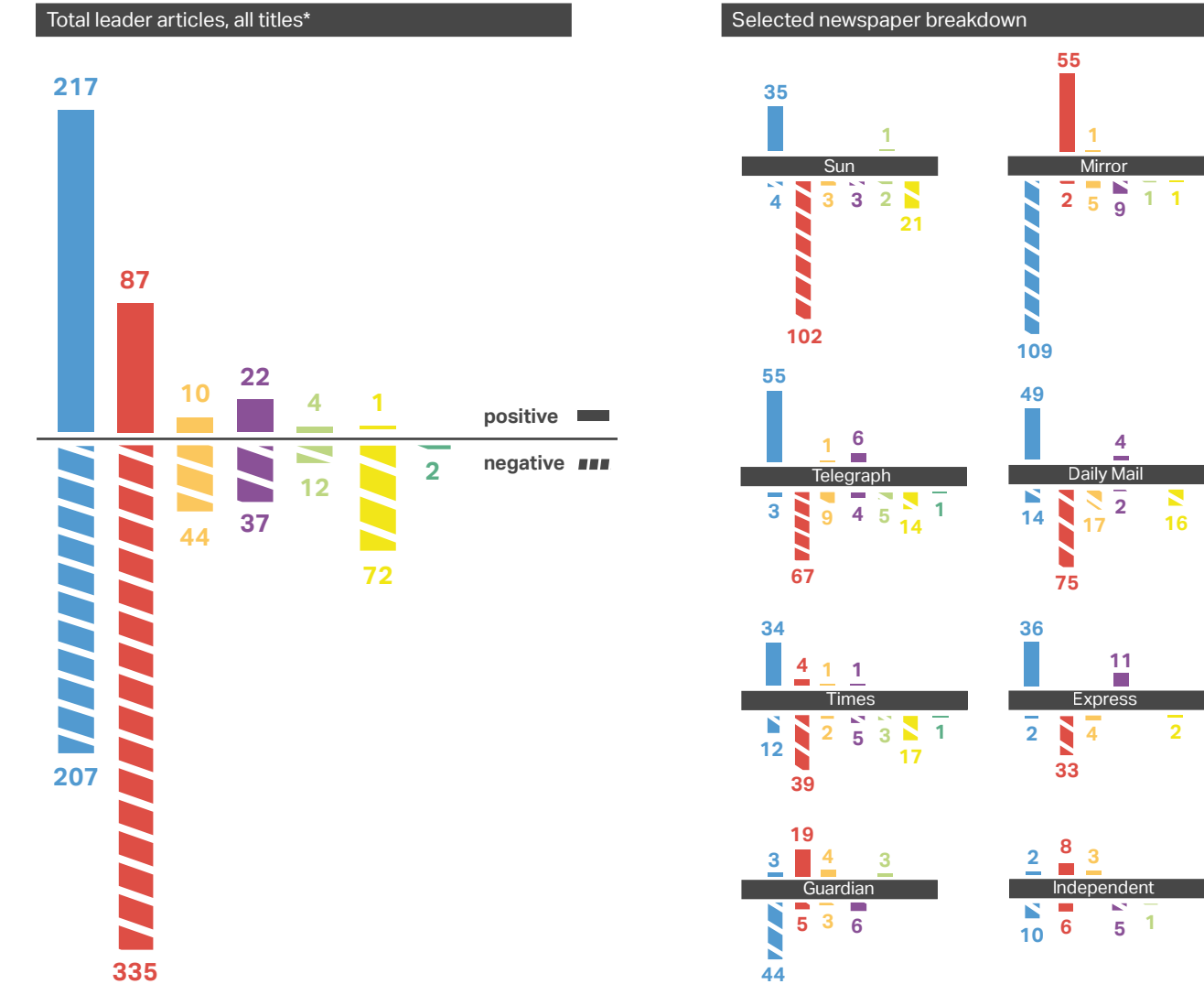
Twitter



TWEETING BY CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Conservative candidates were less likely to tweet, tweeting less than four times a day. Cameron and Miliband regularly tweeted about five times a day, as compared to Natalie Bennett's average of 19 tweets/day. The party press offices were very active on Twitter.

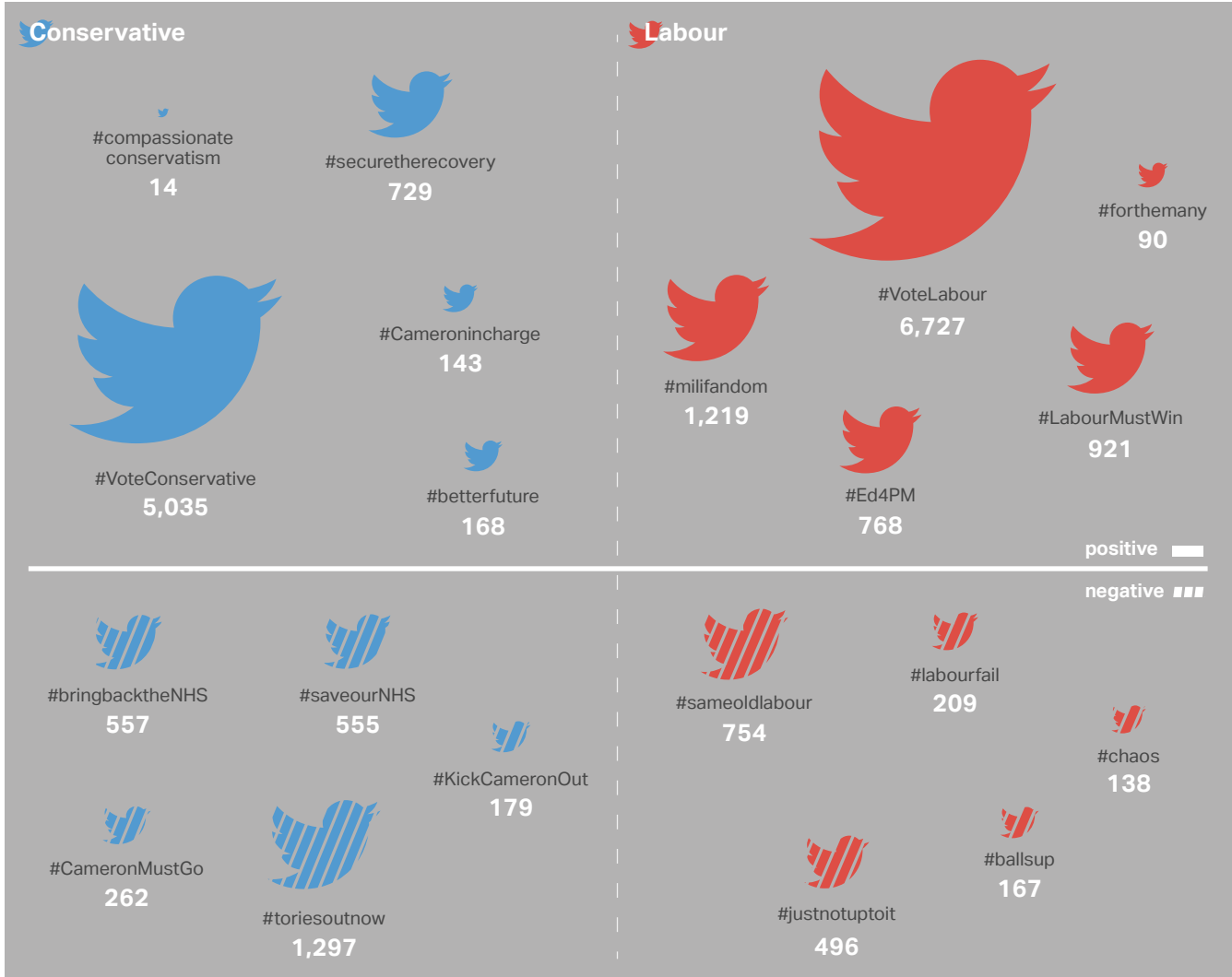
Mainstream media



PARTISANSHIP IN LEADER COLUMNS

There were nearly three times as many positive leader columns for the Conservatives as for Labour. From January through May 2015 there was an average of almost three negative Labour leaders columns a day.

Twitter



PARTISAN HASHTAGS ON TWITTER

Negative hashtags about the NHS stuck most to the Conservatives, while #sameoldlabour and #justnotuptoit stuck to Labour.

week

4

IN WORLD NEWS
A MIGRANT BOAT
CAPSIZED IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN
AND AN EARTHQUAKE
IN NEPAL LEFT
THOUSANDS DEAD
AND HOMELESS

Even ‘real news’ about
migration did not
significantly raise
coverage of that issue
in the campaign. Instead,
the economy continued
to dominate

- Labour
- Conservative
- Lib Dem
- UKIP
- SNP
- Media
- Other

PARTIES

PRESS

TWEETS

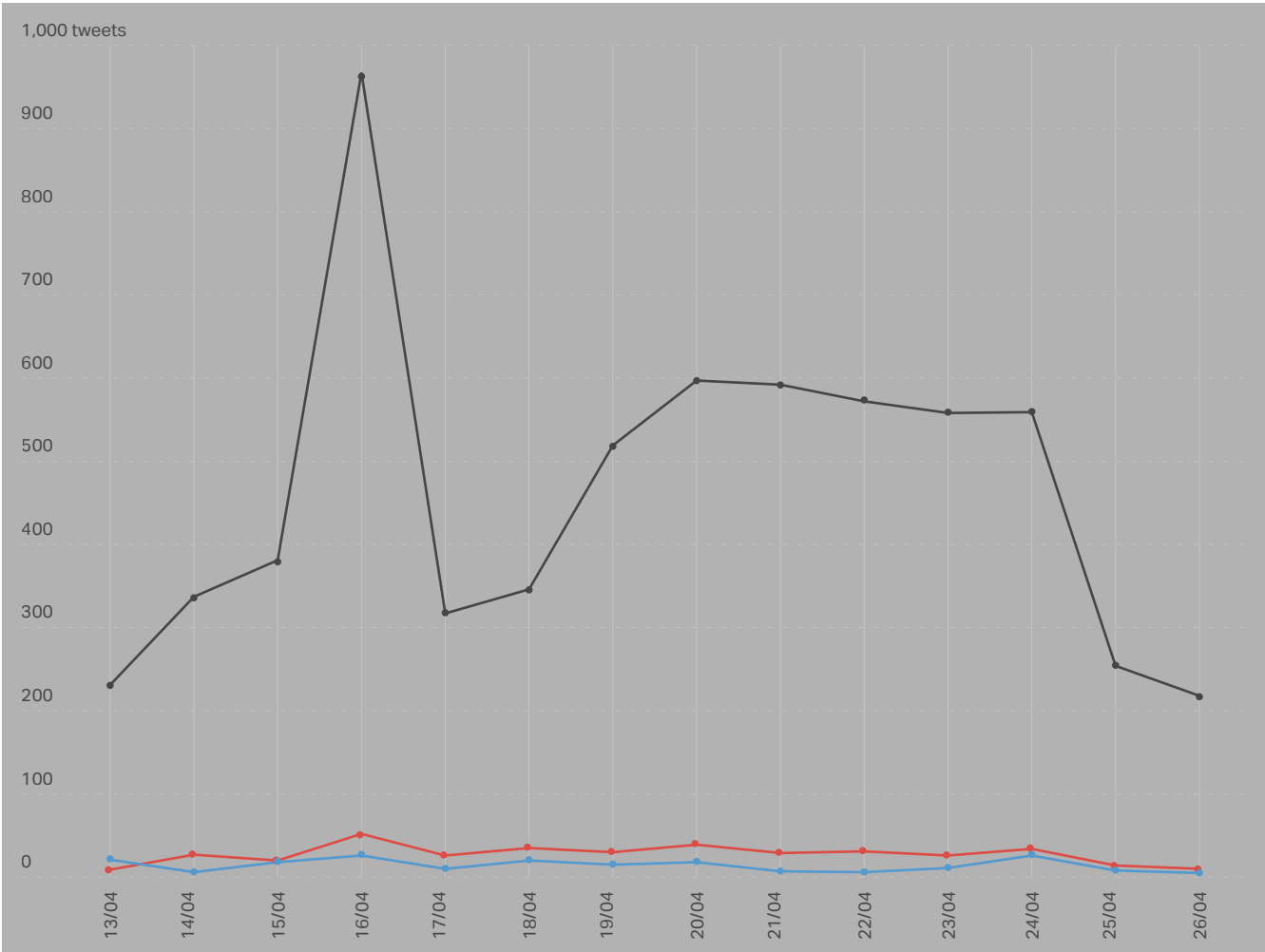
Monday 20 April Tuesday 21 April Wednesday 22 April Thursday 23 April Friday 24 April Saturday 25 April Sunday 26 April

<div>SNP manifesto launch</div>	<div>John Major on lack of passion in Conservative campaign</div>	<div>Cameron and Boris Johnson promote 30 hours free childcare commitment</div>	<div>Labour unveils new campaign posters on NHS</div>	<div>Miliband foreign policy speech (Chatham House)</div>		<div>Cameron in Yeovil – “Let’s finish what we’ve begun”</div>
<div>Labour launch disabilities manifesto</div>	<div>Miliband Manchester speech on NHS crisis</div>					
<div>‘Hundreds Feared Dead As Migrant Vessel Capsizes’ <i>The Guardian</i></div>	<div>‘A Plea To Europe: Stop This Tide Of Death’ <i>The Independent</i></div>	<div>‘Union’s Sinister Hold Over Miliband’ <i>The Daily Mail</i></div>	<div>‘Voters Tell Cameron To Act On Migration’ <i>The Daily Mail</i></div>	<div>‘Miliband Will Bring Back Uncontrolled Migration’ <i>The Daily Mail</i></div>	<div>‘Sturgeon: I Will Use Influence On Labour’ <i>The Times</i></div>	<div>‘Cameron: 11 Days To Save Britain’ <i>The Sunday Express</i></div>
<div>‘Sturgeon makes bid to “lead the UK” with string of policies that overlap with Labour’ <i>The Daily Mail</i></div>		<div>‘Thicky Wiki on Grant Shapps’ <i>The Mirror</i></div>	<div>‘Miliband SNP Pact Would Cost Families £350 Each’ <i>The Telegraph</i></div>	<div>‘EU Vows To Capture And Destroy Trafficker Boats’ <i>The Independent</i></div>		<div>‘May: SNP/Lab Pact “Worst Crisis Since Abdication”’ <i>The Mail on Sunday</i></div>
				<div>‘Labour’s £1,000 Tax On Families’ <i>The Times</i></div>		<div>‘Earthquake And Avalanche Leave At least 1,300 Dead’ <i>The Sunday Telegraph</i></div>
<div>‘Yikes! “Sturgeon makes bid to ‘lead the UK’ with string of policies that overlap with Labour” – Daily Mail http://t.co/63q5hN1jPp’ @GregHands</div>	<div>‘I’ve got the Chicken vote in Southoe’ @JDjanogly</div>	<div>‘Satisfaction with government on immigration at lowest point since 2007 https://t.co/rbyrLtnna’ @BobbyIpsosMORI</div>	<div>‘My promise to Mirror readers – as a Labour Chancellor I will do what it takes to save the NHS http://bit.ly/1ExfltW’ @edballs</div>	<div>‘No, @Independent, the @BBCNewsnight of Nicola #Sturgeon as Kim Kardashian is not “amazing”. It’s “disgusting misogyny” #SNP’ @LouiseMensch</div>		<div>‘Ed Miliband on @MarrShow: “not interested” in doing supply & confidence deal with SNP. Fair enough. But not quite same as “I won’t do one”’ @afneil</div>
<div>‘Rupert Murdoch “berated” Sun journalists to go harder on Miliband and easier on Cameron. Independent.co.uk’ @AdamBienkov</div>		<div>‘My pedometer says I walked 10.1 miles yesterday campaigning up and down in Islington & Battersea. Tired today *pours 3rd cup of tea*’ @EmilyThornberry</div>	<div>‘What motivates UKIP voters in Con-held UKIP targets? New ComRes/ITV News poll finds immigration top reason’ @Andrew_ComRes</div>			<div>‘When it comes to deals with the SNP, @Ed_Miliband’s got form http://t.co/wx9sSY0PqJ’ @CCHQPress</div>

Immigration

Immigration, despite being one of the top three concerns of the public according to opinion polls, was the fifth most written about issue in mainstream media, and was hardly tweeted about by candidates

Twitter



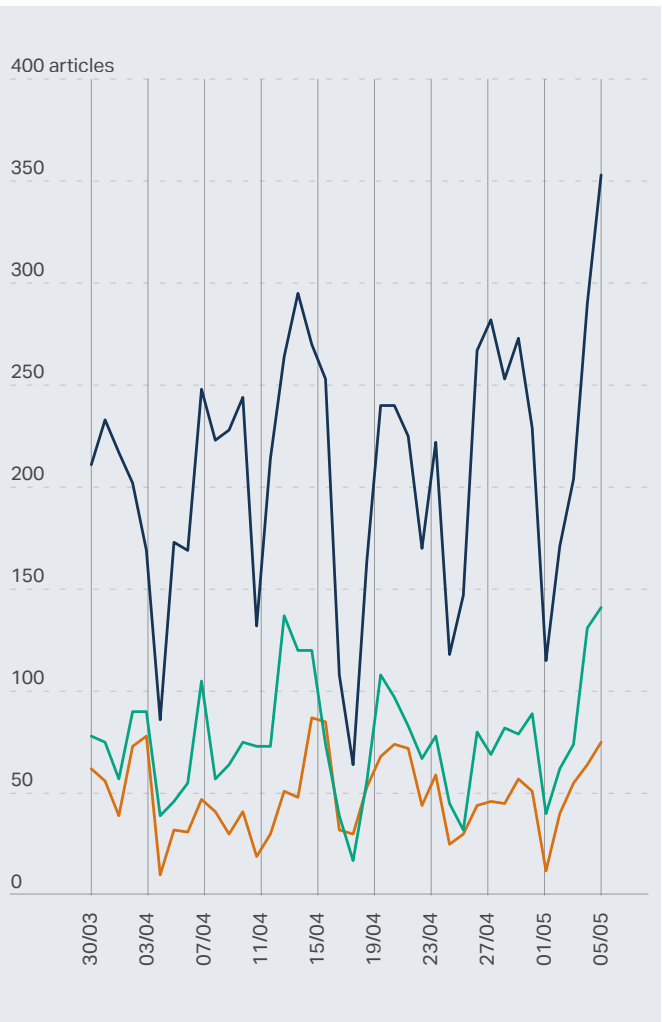
CONSERVATIVE & LABOUR CANDIDATES TWEETING ABOUT IMMIGRATION (WEEKS THREE & FOUR)

● Total tweets (Actors & Influencers) ● Labour Candidates ● Conservative Candidates

*Based on tweets from 3,290 political actors and influencers from 13 April – 26 April

Even when immigration was a central topic in the challengers debate, and was discussed across Europe following a migrant tragedy in the Mediterranean, Conservative and Labour candidates hardly mentioned immigration. All Conservative candidates combined tweeted, on average, a total of 14 tweets a day on immigration. Overall, political actors and influencers were tweeting over 460 times a day about immigration.

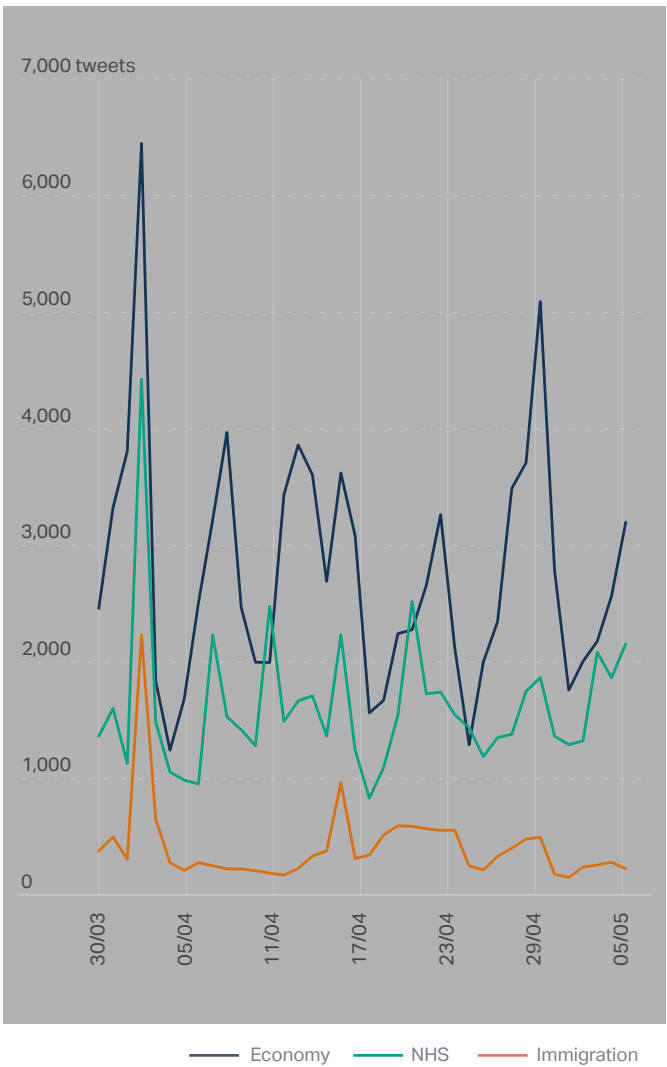
Mainstream media



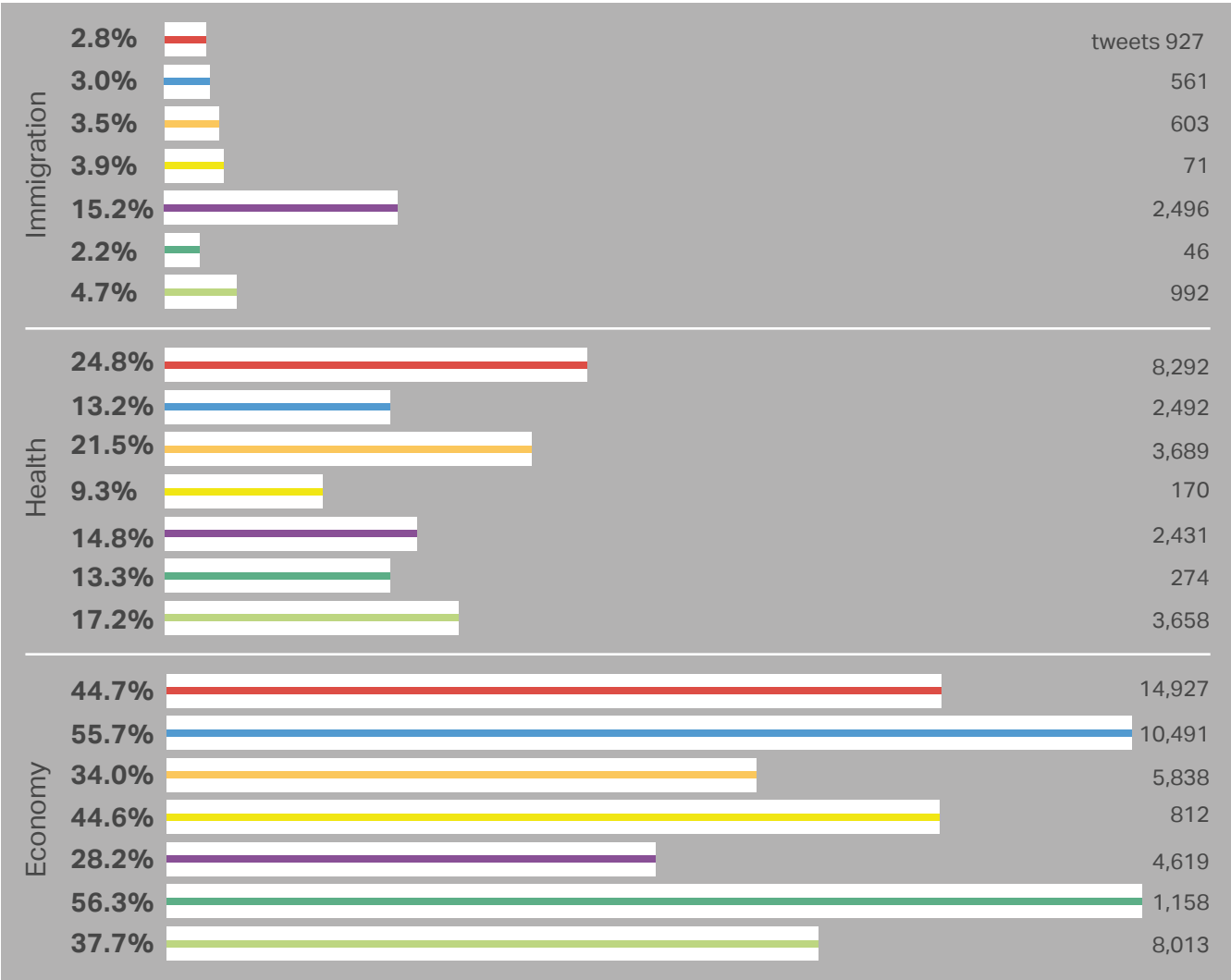
COVERAGE OF THE NHS/HEALTH AND IMMIGRATION

Throughout the campaign neither health nor immigration ever exceeded the economy as the main topic of debate in mainstream media. Health related tweets equalled those on the economy a handful of times, but only ever briefly.

Twitter



Twitter



● Labour ● Conservative ● Lib Dem ● UKIP ● SNP ● Green ● Plaid Cymru

*Based on all tweets by 2,412 Parliamentary candidates – incumbents and challengers – from 30 March – 6 May

PROPORTION OF CANDIDATE TWEETS ON IMMIGRATION, HEALTH AND ECONOMY

UKIP candidates were more than five times more likely to tweet about immigration than Conservative or Labour candidates. All party candidates were more likely to tweet about health than the Conservatives, with the exception of the SNP.

Mainstream media



WHO COVERED WHAT (MAINSTREAM MEDIA)

The economy was the most covered political issue on every traditional news outlet. No mainstream media outlet devoted more than 6% of its policy coverage to the environment or more than 3% to transport.

IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE ELECTION THE THREE LEADERS ANSWERED QUESTIONS FROM A LIVE AUDIENCE, RUSSELL BRAND INTERVIEWED ED MILIBAND AND THE SUN ENDORSED THE CONSERVATIVES

In the final stages of the campaign the press and Twitter became even more focused on the role of the SNP and the possible permutations of a coalition government. Politics paused for news of a royal birth on the Sunday

Labour

Conservative

Media

Other

PARTIES

PRESS

TWEETS

Monday 27 April	Tuesday 28 April	Wednesday 29 April	Thursday 30 April	Friday 1 May	Saturday 2 May	Sunday 3 May
<div></div> <div>Cameron's speech on campaign 'passion' – 'I feel bloody lively'</div>	<div></div> <div>Miliband 100-day action plan on immigration</div> <div></div> <div>Conservatives announce extension of Coastal Communities Fund</div>	<div></div> <div>Miliband-Russell Brand interview released</div>	<div></div> <div>Cameron, Miliband and Clegg on Question Time</div>			<div></div> <div>Miliband unveils election pledge stone</div> <div></div> <div>Final Scottish leaders' debate</div>
<div></div> <div>'Exclusive letter from 5,000 small business owners' <i>The Telegraph</i></div> <div></div> <div>'Race To Rescue Quake Britons' <i>The Express</i></div>	<div></div> <div>'Cameron: Ten Days To Save The Union' <i>The Times</i></div> <div></div> <div>'Fear Of SNP Alliance Dents Labour Support' <i>The Independent</i></div>	<div></div> <div>'Monster Raving Labour Party' <i>The Sun</i></div>	<div></div> <div>'Miliband Heads For Wipeout In Scotland' <i>The Telegraph</i></div> <div></div> <div>'40% Of Voters Still Can't Decide' <i>The Daily Mail</i></div> <div></div> <div>'It's a Tory!' <i>The Sun</i></div>	<div></div> <div>'Miliband Hardens His Line: I Will Not Do Deal With SNP' <i>The Guardian</i></div>	<div></div> <div>'Miliband Forced To Back Down Over Deal With SNP' <i>The Telegraph</i></div>	<div></div> <div>'The New People's Princess' <i>The Sunday Times</i></div> <div></div> <div>'Bless Her!' <i>The Sunday Express</i></div> <div></div> <div>'Sleeping Cutie' <i>The Mirror</i></div>
<div></div> <div>'Today over 5,000 small businesses, employing almost 100,000 people have signed a letter backing our plan telegraph.co.uk' @George_Osborne</div> <div></div> <div>'Small Business letter to the Telegraph; an attempt to defraud the electorate? How it all fell apart [Link to SturdyBlog]' @SturdyAlex</div>	<div></div> <div>'Coming to a garden near you: Mili-a man propped up by a lectern and waiting to be propped up by the SNP' @BorisJohnson</div>	<div></div> <div>'Watch my interview with @rustyroockets where I tell him that voting can make change happen' @Ed_Miliband</div> <div></div> <div>'So after a series of polls where things were moving to the Tories latest YouGov has LAB 1% ahead compared with 1% CON lead of yesterday' @MSmithsonPB</div>	<div></div> <div>'I want to be completely clear: there will no coalition and no deals with the SNP' @Ed_Miliband</div>	<div></div> <div>'Telegraph: Revealed: the secret documents which show the SNP's plan to hold Labour to ransom http://t.co/FeEizF6d6v' @CCHQPress</div>	<div></div> <div>'Times admits "Labour's £1000 tax on families' story was completely wrong" LeftFootForward.org' @MediaWatchLFF</div>	<div></div> <div>'Tories have a point about #EdStone: "There's measuring the curtains, and then there's ordering an 8ft stone monument for the garden."'' @FraserNelson</div>

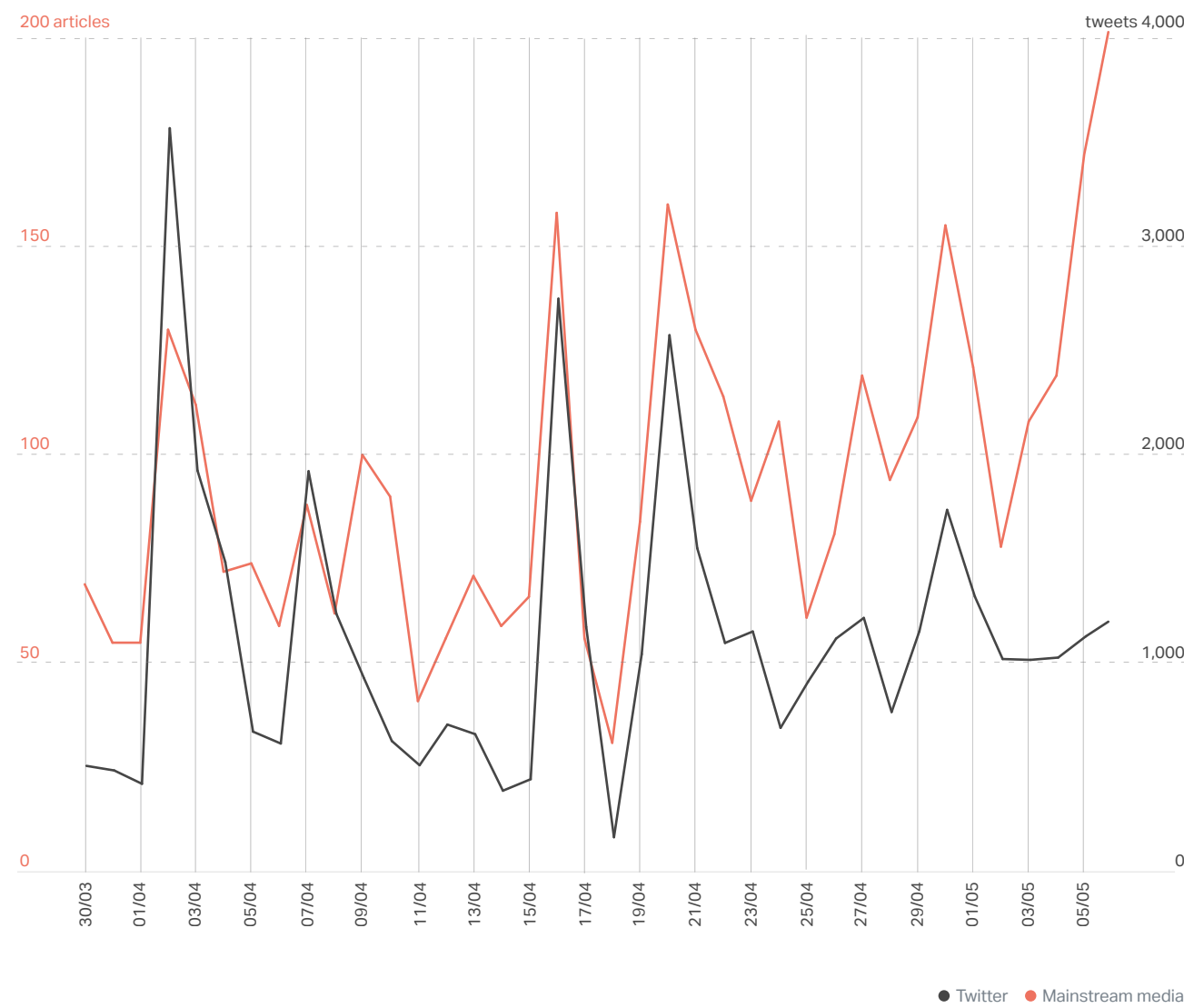
Monday 4 May	Tuesday 5 May	Wednesday 6 May	Thursday 7 May
<div><div></div><div>Delia Smith endorses Labour party</div></div> <div><div></div><div>George Osborne announces Star Wars VIII to be filmed at Pinewood Studios</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Gordon Brown speaks to voters in Scotland, urging them to choose Labour over SNP</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Cameron speaks at Conservative rally in Carlisle</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Miliband speaks at Labour rally in Leeds</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>ELECTION DAY</div></div>
<div><div></div><div>'The 100,000 Voters Who Could Win Tories Power' <i>The Telegraph</i></div></div> <div><div></div><div>'Cameron And Clegg Prepared To Move Quickly To Form Coalition' <i>FT</i></div></div>	<div><div></div><div>'A Vote For Ukip "Is A Suicide Note For Britain"' <i>The Telegraph</i></div></div> <div><div></div><div>'Ed: Nurses Face Axe At 66% Of Hospitals' <i>The Mirror</i></div></div>	<div><div></div><div>'Miliband Trying To Con Way Into No 10, Says PM' <i>The Times</i></div></div> <div><div></div><div>'Save Our Bacon' <i>The Sun</i></div></div> <div><div></div><div>'Why You Must Vote For UKIP' <i>The Express</i></div></div>	
<div><div></div><div>"Issue-by-issue, vote-by-vote" – that's how the SNP will hold Ed Miliband to ransom. Youtube' <i>@CCHQPress</i></div></div> <div><div></div><div>'Fighting Farage blasts critics as the Ukip leader promises a poll shock [Express link]' <i>@Nigel_Farage</i></div></div>	<div><div></div><div>'In less than 48hours, the polls will open and we can choose to build a country that works for all working people, not just a few at the top' <i>@Ed_Miliband</i></div></div> <div><div></div><div>'@nick_clegg confirms LibDems will deal with whichever party wins the most seats & votes' <i>@BBCr4today</i></div></div>	<div><div></div><div>'@RobDotHutton Can you help. Know I cannot use knife edge too close to call, neck and neck and closest election for generation. What else' <i>@PatrickWintour</i></div></div>	

CAMPAIGN THEME

SNP and polling

The SNP was the 'bogeyman' of the 2015 campaign in the UK press

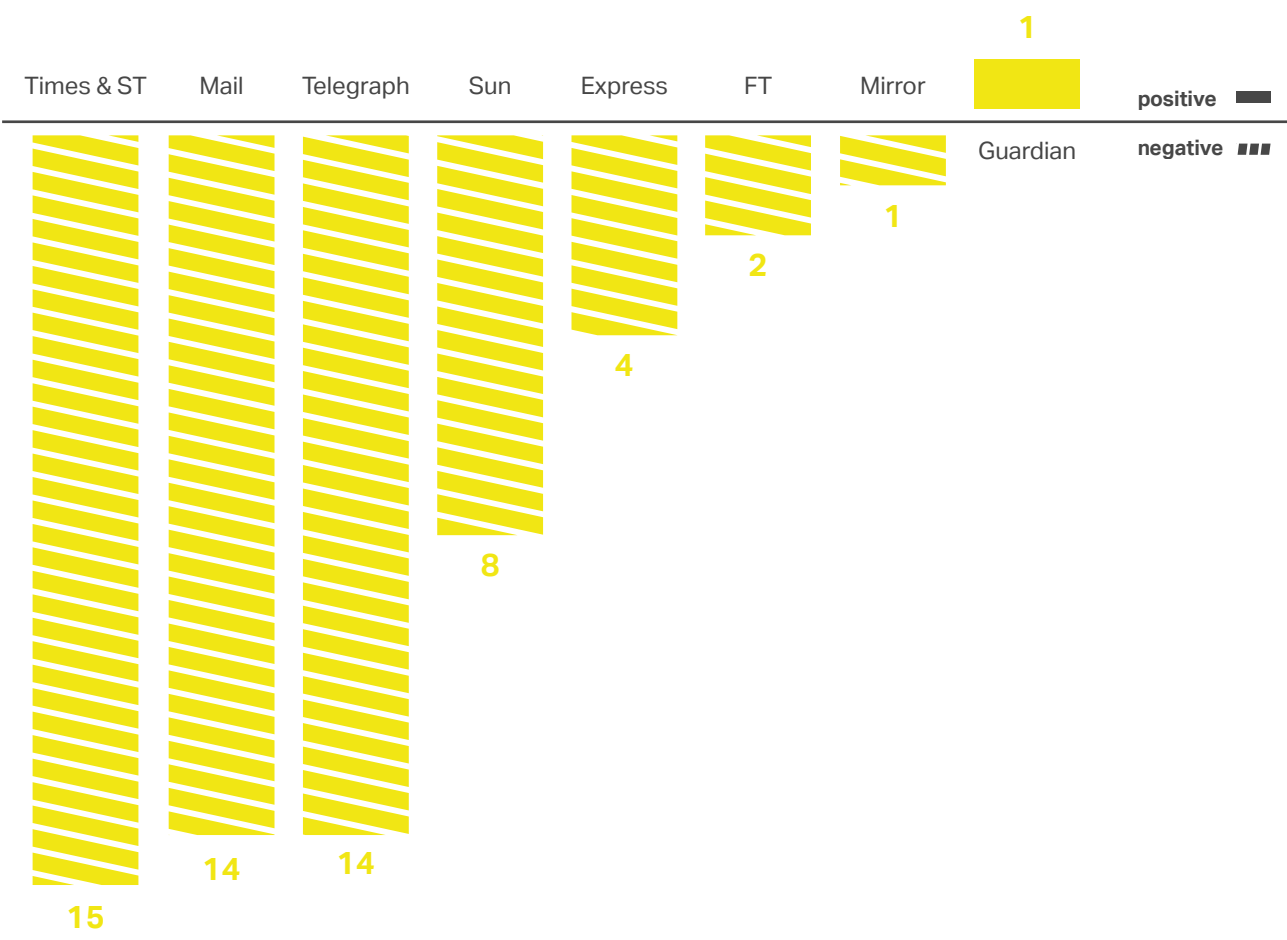
Mainstream media & Twitter



MENTIONS OF STURGEON IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND ON TWITTER

By the end of the campaign Nicola Sturgeon was being mentioned in, on average, over 130 news articles a day, and in over 1,200 tweets by political actors and influencers.

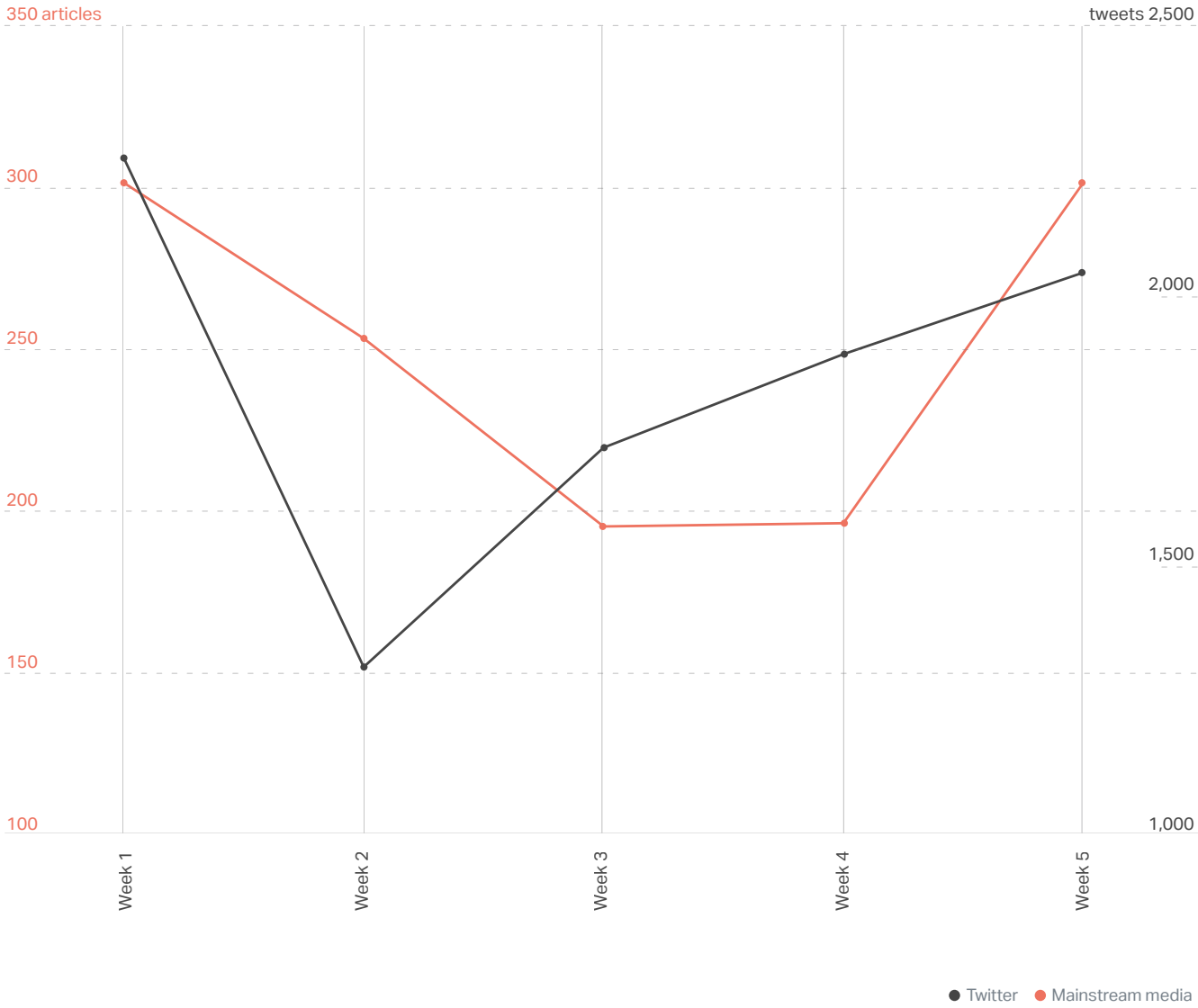
Mainstream media



POSITIVE VS NEGATIVE LEADER COLUMNS ABOUT THE SNP

Of 59 leader columns in the national press about the SNP during the 2015 election campaign, only one was positive (not including Scottish editions).

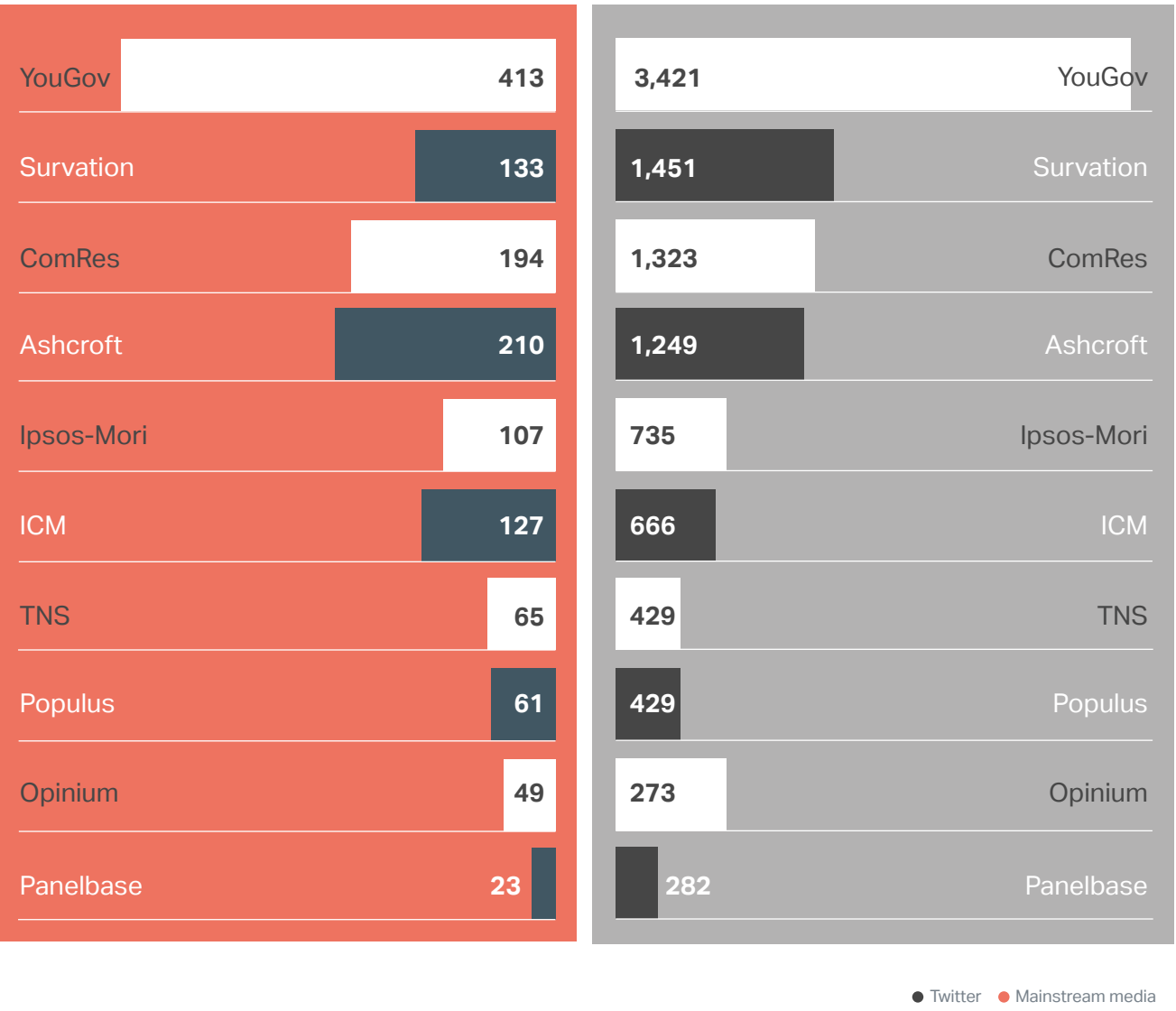
Mainstream media & Twitter



REFERENCES TO POLLING COMPANIES
WEEK-BY-WEEK (OVERALL)

On average there were 230 articles referring to polling companies each week during the campaign and over 1,700 tweets referring to polling companies by political actors and influencers.

Mainstream media & Twitter

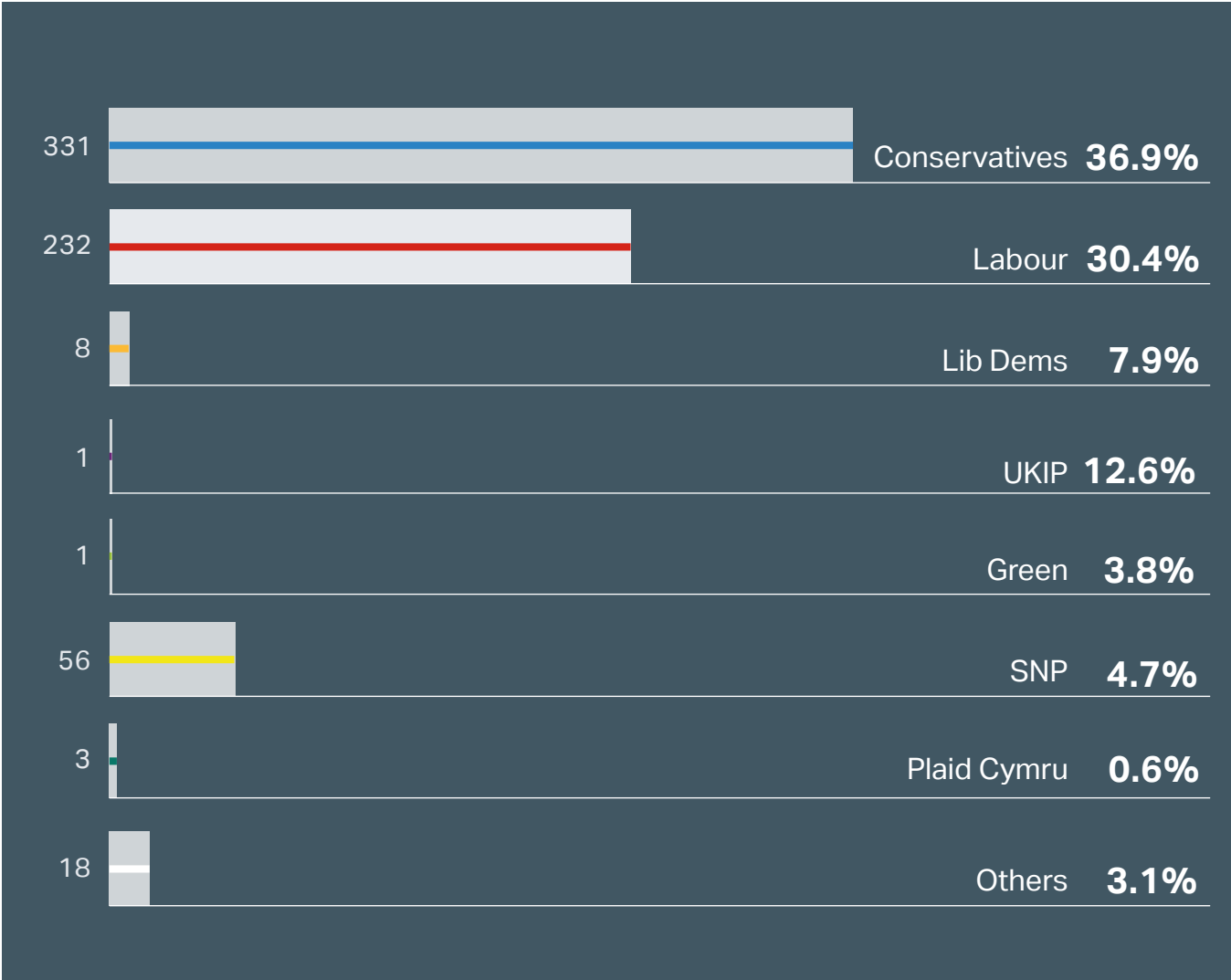


REFERENCES TO SPECIFIC POLLING
COMPANIES

YouGov, Survation and ComRes were the most referenced polling companies in the press and amongst political actors and influencers. Neither they nor their competitors correctly predicted the election result.

FINAL RESULTS

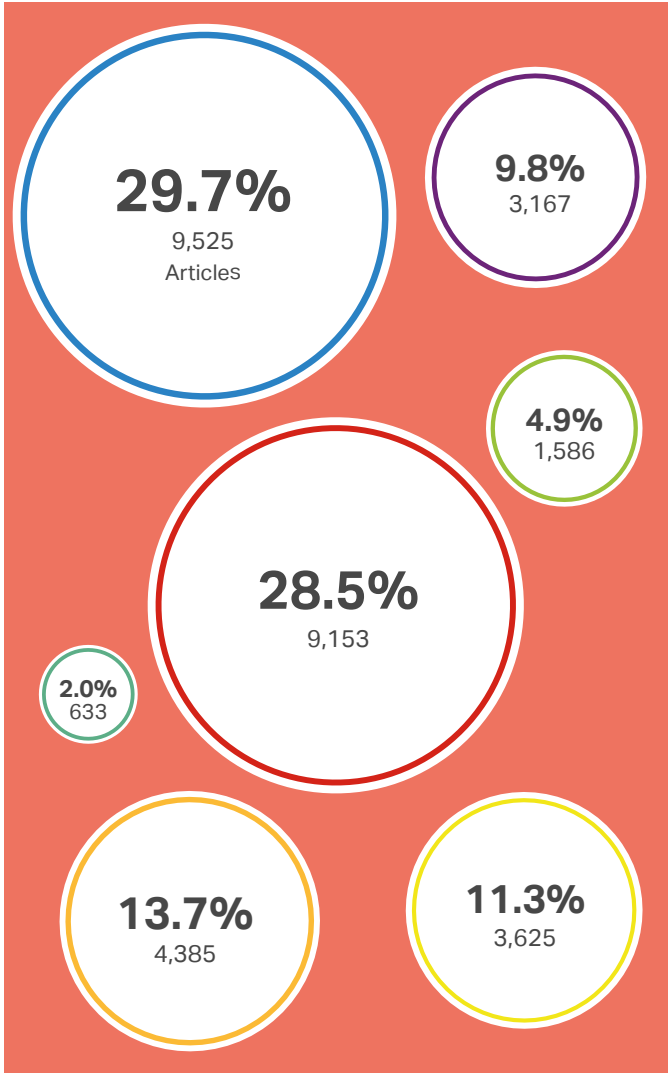
Based on percentage vote share, the Conservatives did not receive as much coverage as they might have expected, and the LibDems received more



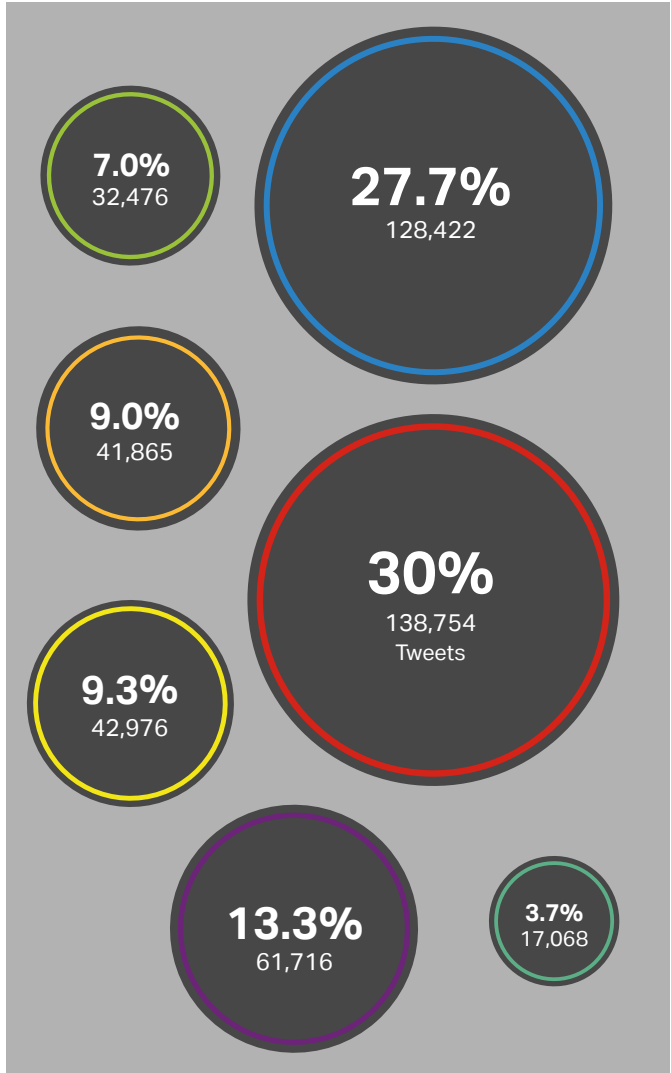
UK 2015 GENERAL ELECTION RESULT

The Conservatives won a majority with 331 seats (including the Speaker's seat) and 36.9% of the vote.

Mainstream media



Twitter



● Labour ● Conservative ● Lib Dem ● UKIP ● SNP ● Green ● Plaid Cymru

CUMULATIVE PARTY COVERAGE – MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND TWITTER

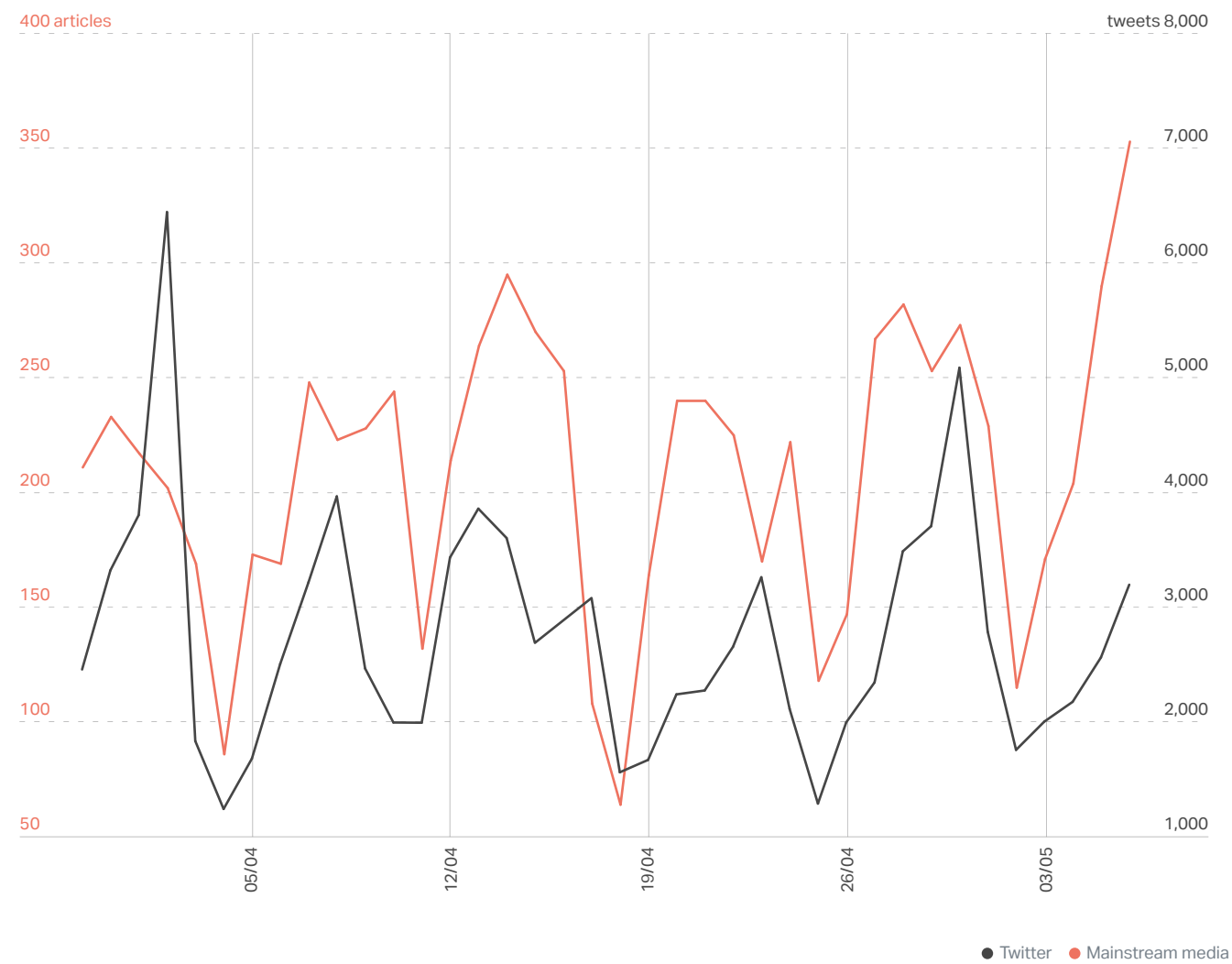
The Liberal Democrats received 73% more coverage in the press than their share of the vote.

CAMPAIGN THEME

Mainstream media agenda vs Twitter

Mainstream media agenda and Twitter agenda (for political actors and influencers) follow similar profile

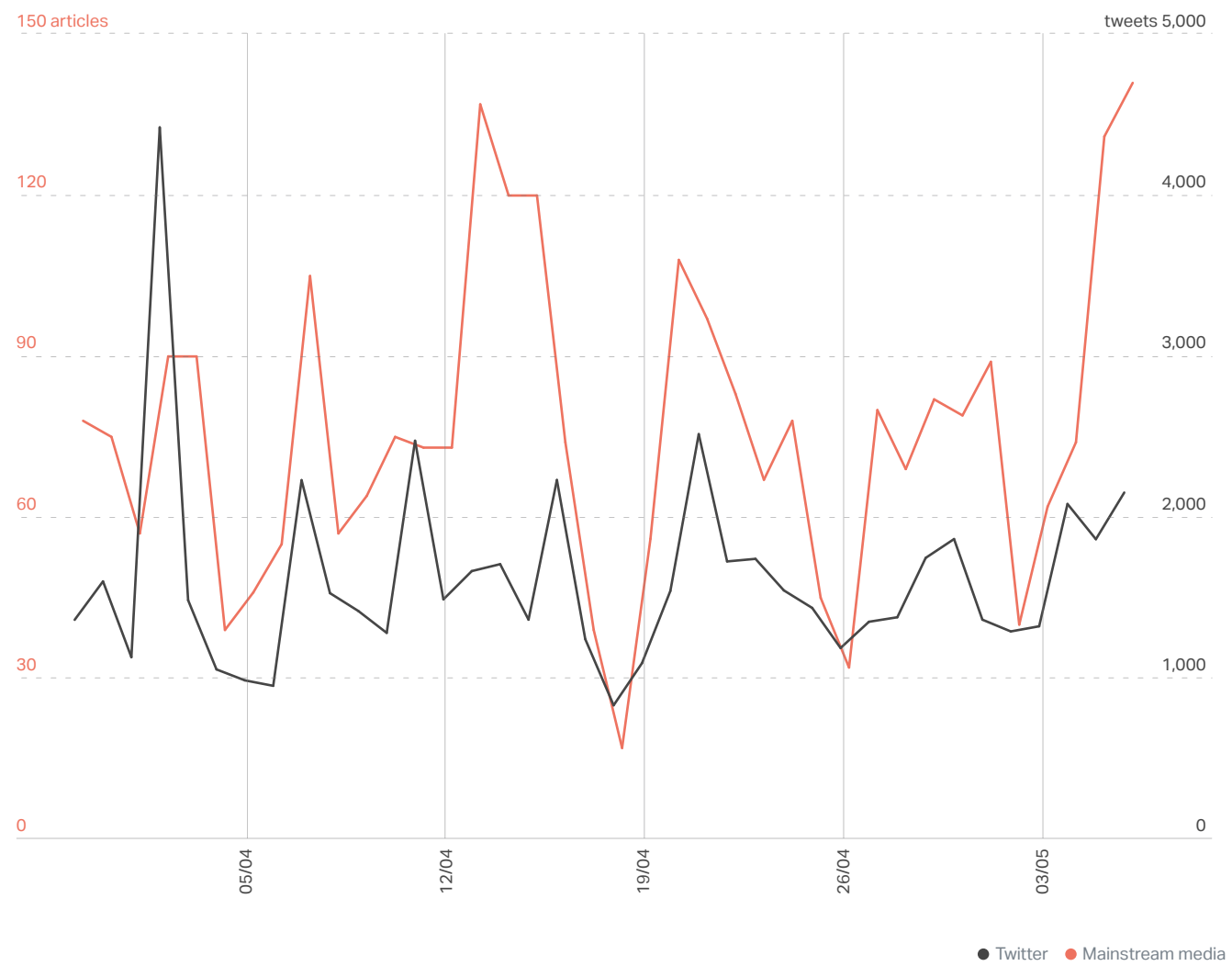
Mainstream media & Twitter



THE ECONOMY – MSM VS TWITTER

Interest in the economy on Twitter peaked during TV debates, while mainstream media was more interested in manifesto launches. Otherwise the topography of each is similar.

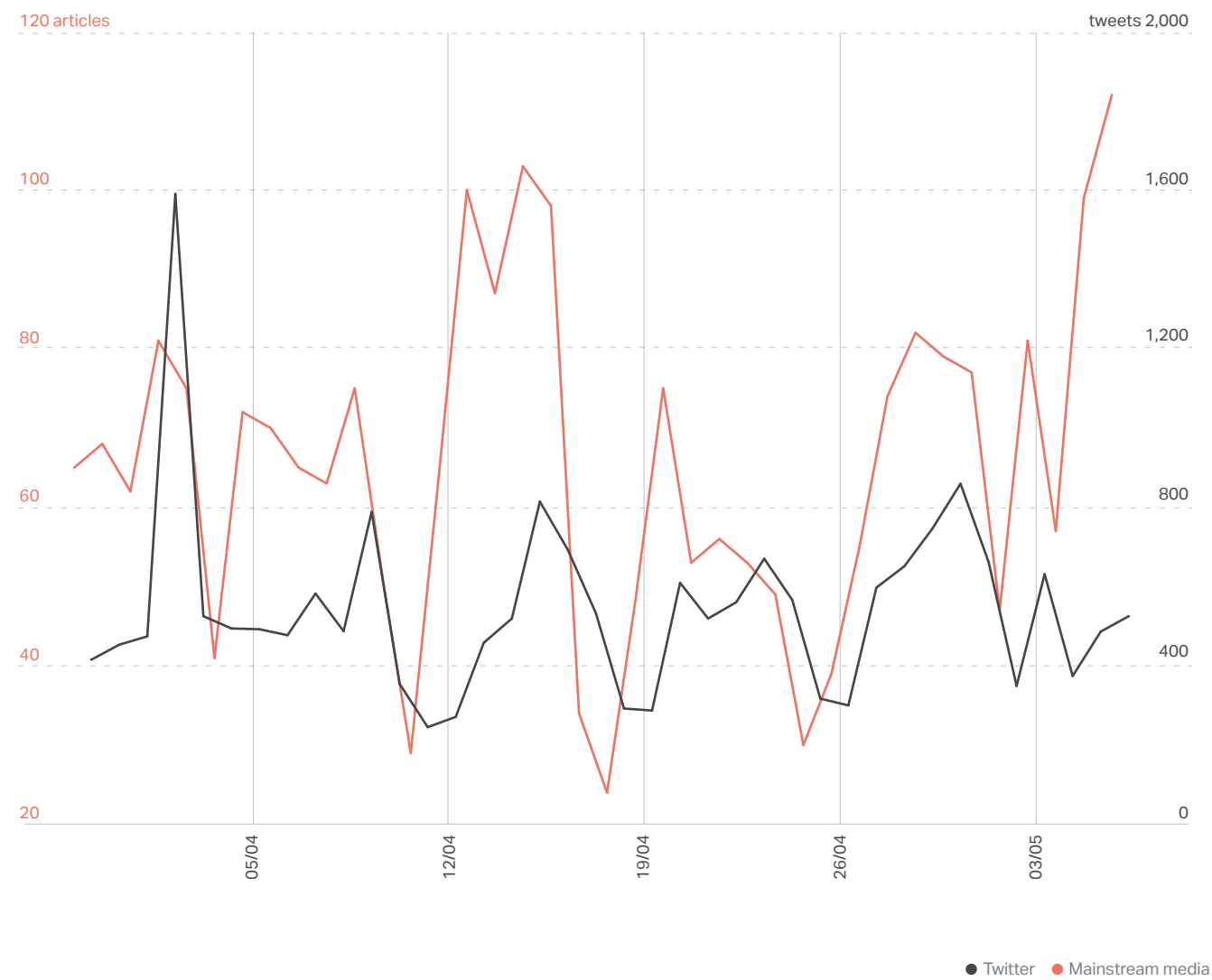
Mainstream media & Twitter



NHS – MSM VS TWITTER

As with the economy, discussion of the NHS on Twitter mapped relatively closely to discussion of the NHS in mainstream media, except when the manifestos were published in week three.

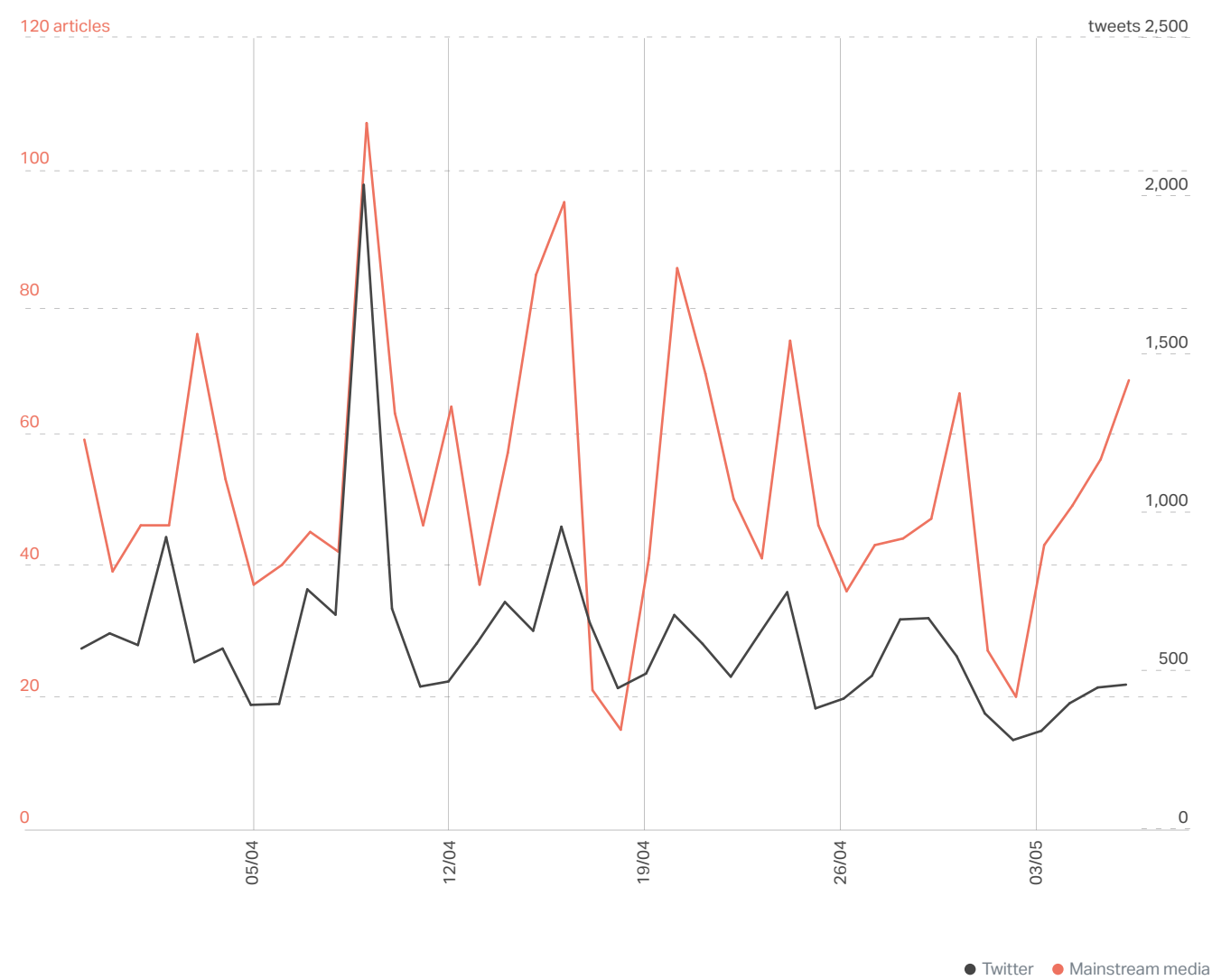
Mainstream media & Twitter



EDUCATION – MSM VS TWITTER

Education rarely rose to be a major campaign issue. Twitter peaked briefly during the leaders debate. Mainstream media interest focused on education commitments in the manifestos.

Mainstream media & Twitter

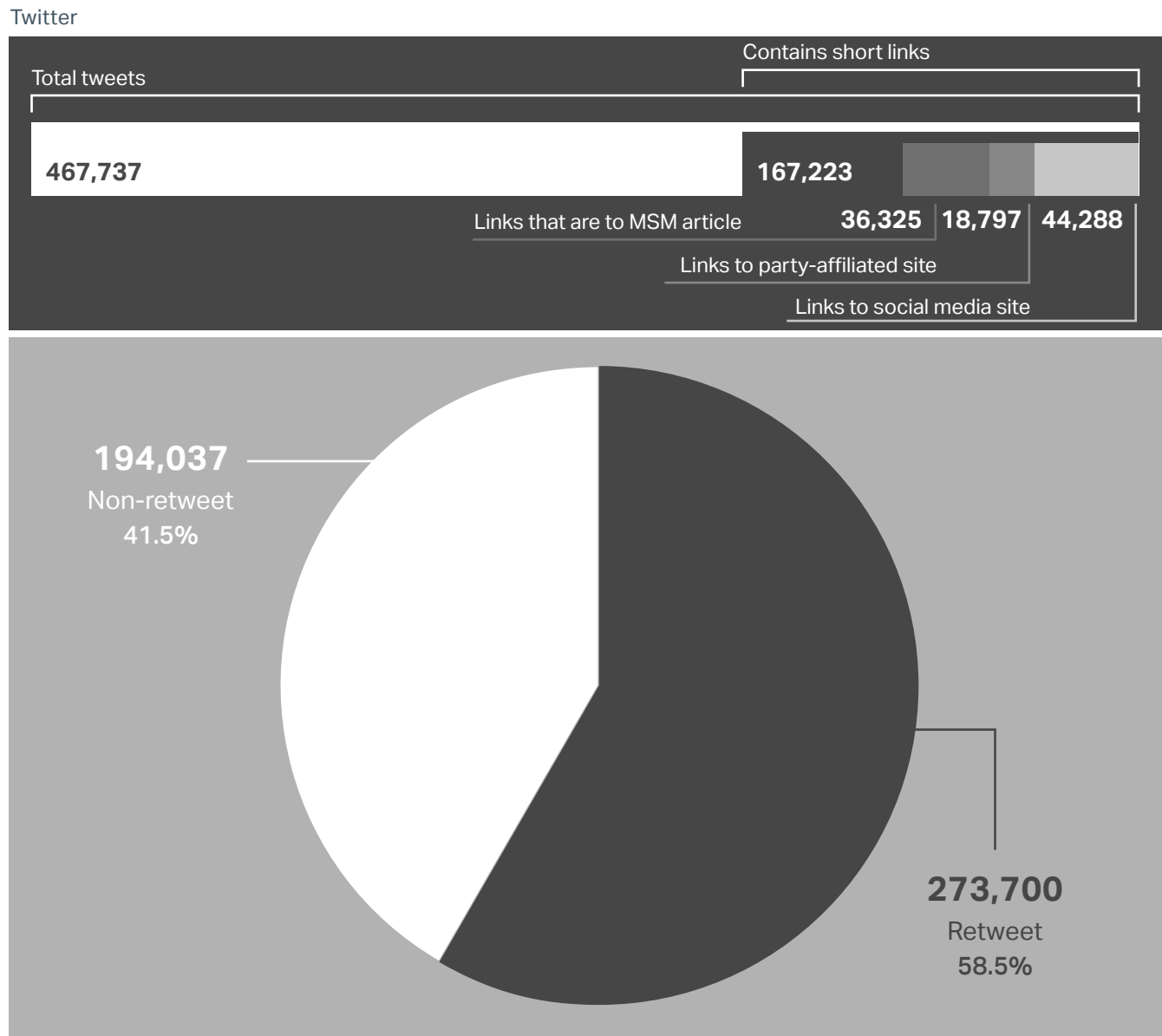


FOREIGN POLICY AND DEFENCE –
MSM VS TWITTER

Discussion of foreign policy and defence peaked on 9 April when Michael Fallon accused Ed Miliband of being a 'Backstabber' and attacked his policy on Trident. Further spikes occurred during the challengers debate and SNP manifesto launch.

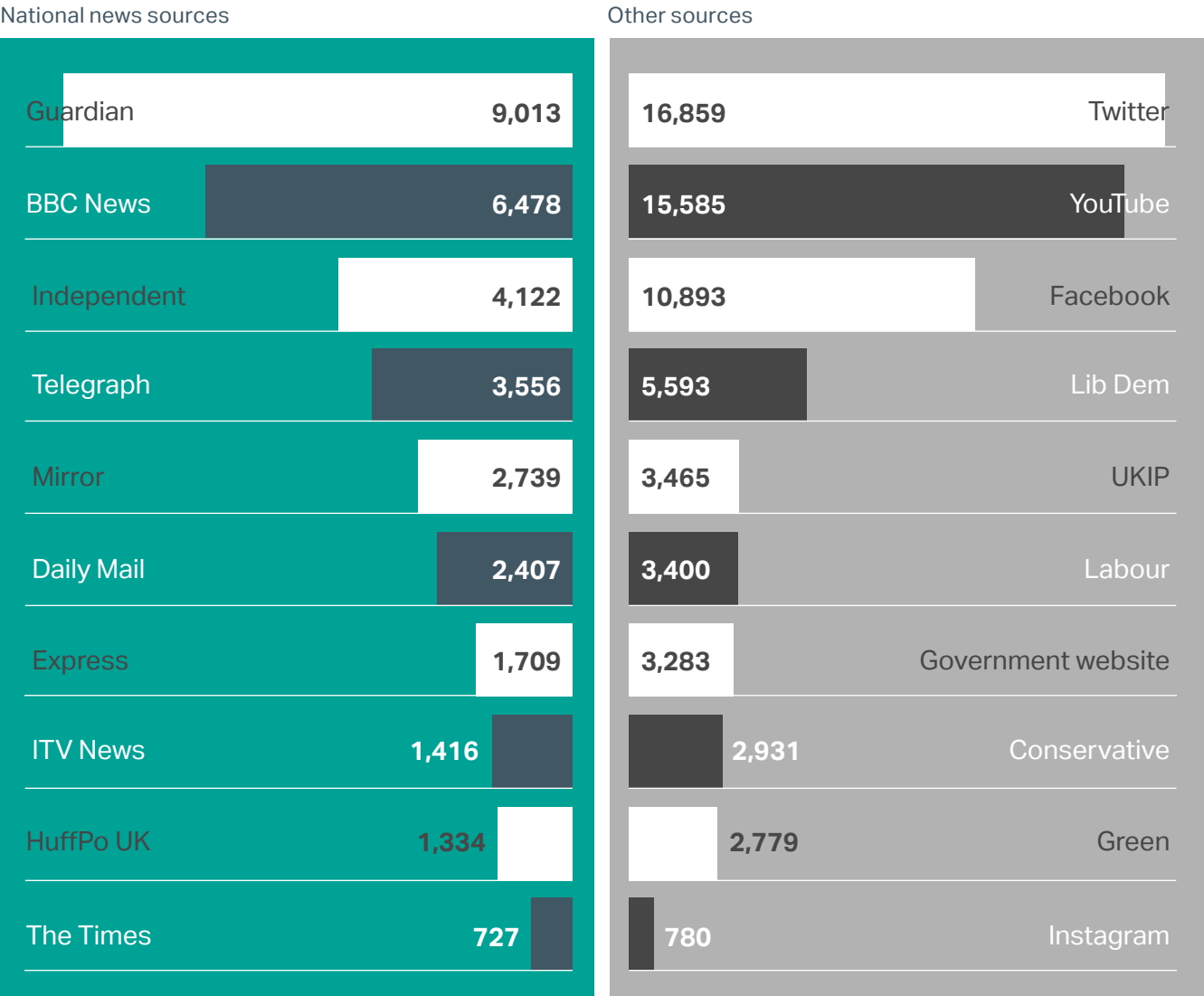
Sources of authority on Twitter

Candidates were as likely as political influencers to link out, though more likely simply to retweet



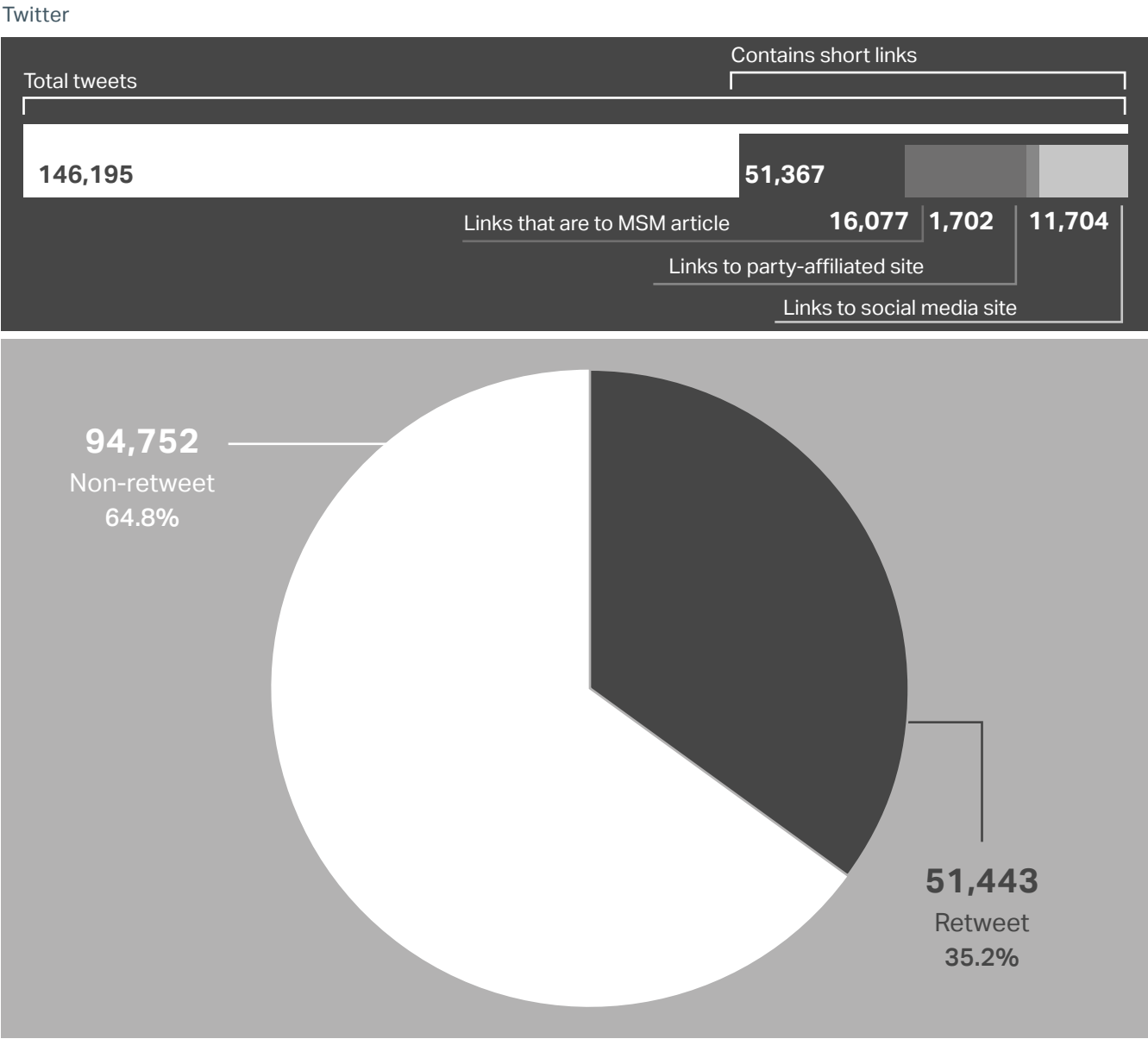
CANDIDATES LINKING ON TWITTER

Candidates linked out from 36% of their tweets. Of these, about one in five links were to articles on national news websites. Almost 60% of candidates tweets were retweets.



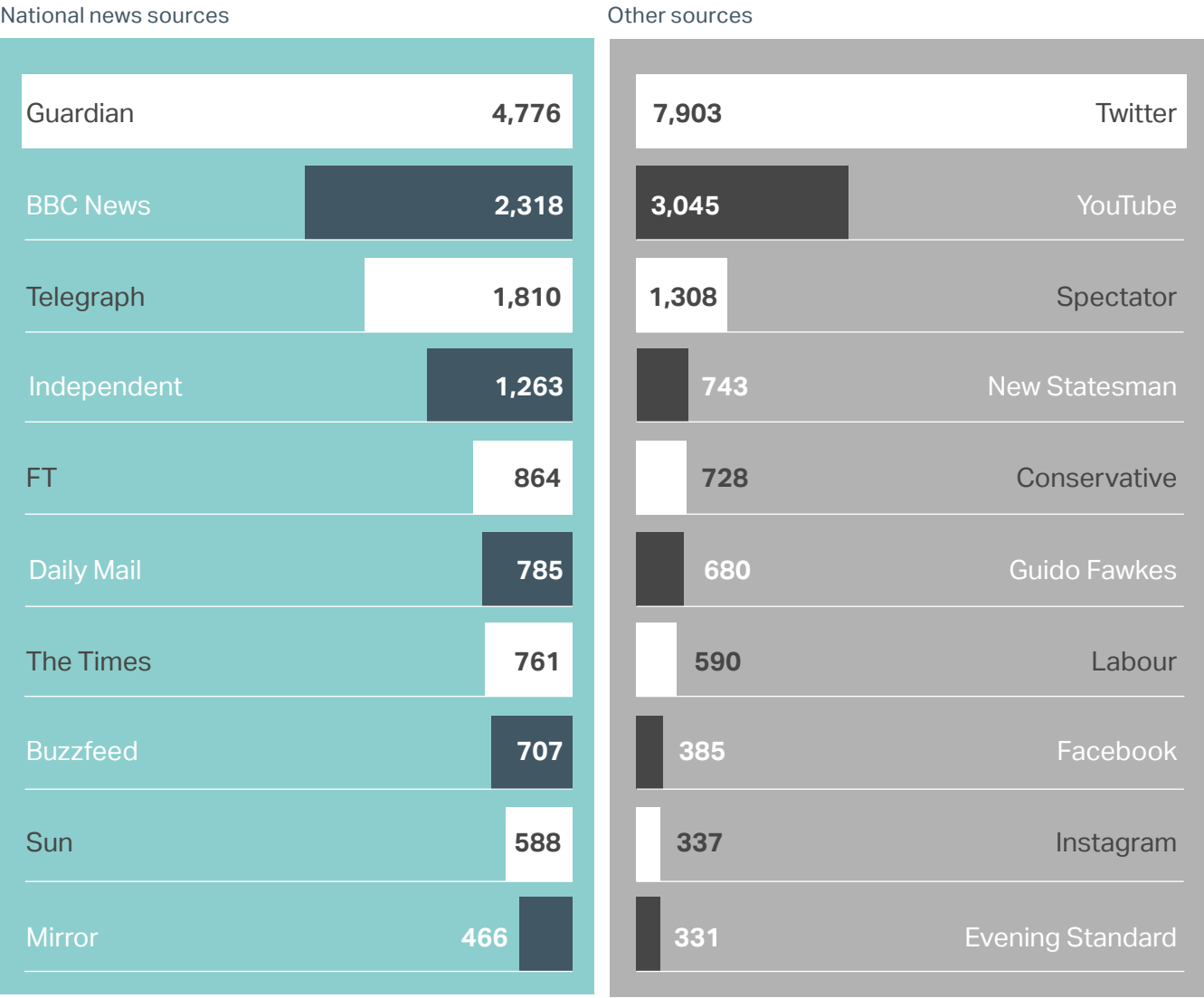
WHERE CANDIDATES LINKED TO FROM TWITTER

Parliamentary candidates were more than twice as likely to link out to Twitter, YouTube and Facebook than to *the Guardian*, the BBC and *the Independent*.



POLITICAL INFLUENCERS LINKING ON TWITTER

Over a third of political influencers' tweets have shortlinks, and almost a third of those link to articles published in national news sources. 35% of their tweets were retweets.



WHERE POLITICAL INFLUENCERS LINKED TO FROM TWITTER

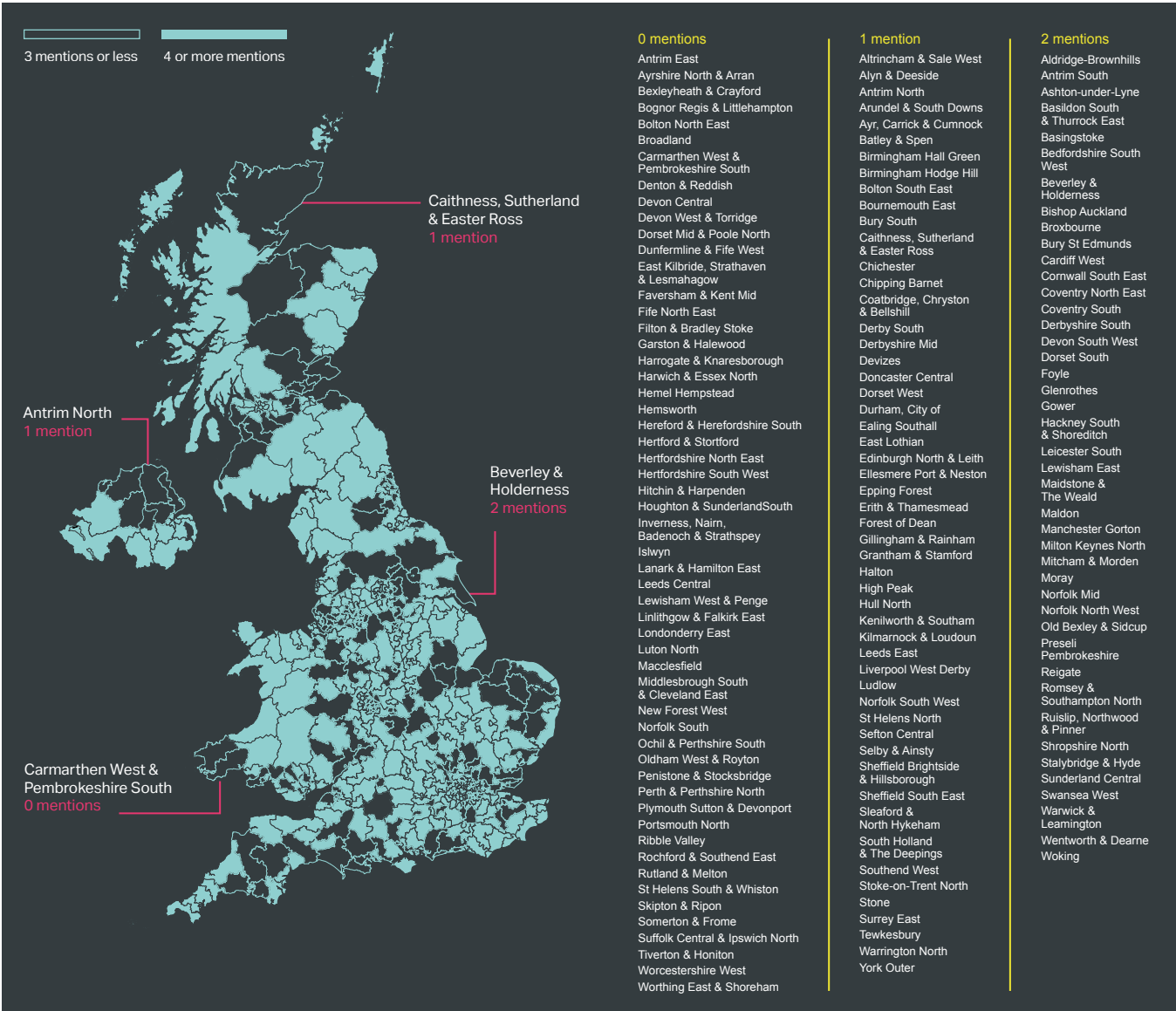
The Guardian, The BBC and the Telegraph were the most linked to national news sources. Twitter and YouTube were the most linked to social media sites.

CAMPAIGN THEME

Growing hurdles for challengers

Many constituencies were not reported in mainstream media over the long campaign. Twitter followings have yet to provide much exposure to local candidates, particularly challengers

Mainstream media

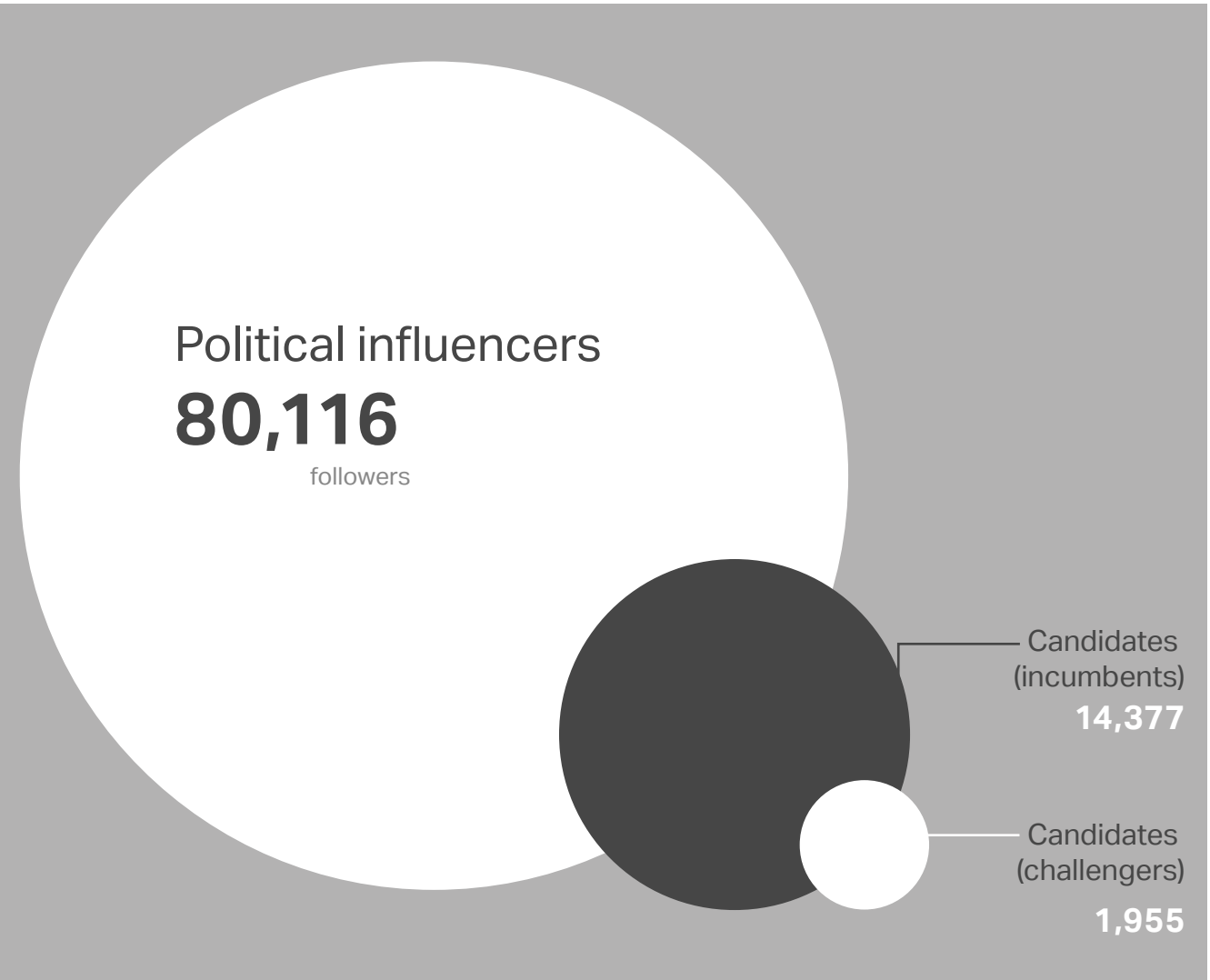


*Based on all articles from 16 UK national online news outlets from 5 January – 19 April

COVERAGE OF CONSTITUENCIES IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

194 constituencies received three mentions or fewer from 5 January to 19 April 2015 in national online news sites. 54 constituencies received no coverage at all.

Mainstream media



TWITTER FOLLOWERS – INCUMBENTS, CHALLENGERS AND INFLUENCERS

Incumbents have, on average, seven times as many Twitter followers as challengers. Political influencers have about five times more followers than incumbents.

CONCLUSION

The 2015 UK General Election campaign was fought over the economy. During every week of the six-week official campaign the economy dominated debate on national news websites and amongst political actors and influencers on Twitter. There were occasions when other issues gained brief prominence – such as Trident, prompted by the SNP, and Michael Fallon’s attack on Ed Miliband – but the focus always reverted back to the economy within a day or two.

The economy was also the terrain on which the Conservatives sought to win the election. From the first day of the official campaign they issued a series of statements extolling their own handling of the economy (deficit halved, 2m more people in work, apprenticeships doubled), criticizing Labour’s economic record (#sameoldLabour, #justnotuptoit) and making financial commitments should they be elected (£8bn to the NHS, right-to-buy, inheritance tax cut). These messages were communicated consistently by the party leadership, the party press office and by the candidates themselves. 55% of political tweets by Conservative candidates were about the economy.

These Conservative messages were then reported regularly and sympathetically by many national newspapers. *The Times* led the campaign with the Conservatives’ claim of a ‘Labour tax bombshell’. It went even further later, declaring that a Labour government would mean an extra ‘£1,000 tax on families’ (subsequently found to be incorrect). *The Telegraph* pressed the message that both business chiefs and small businesses supported the Conservatives. *The Sun* published leader columns supportive of the Conservatives (35 from January to May) and anti-Labour (102 from January to May), spent days out with David Cameron and Boris Johnson, and published articles about people who had benefitted from Conservative policies.

The Labour leader, Ed Miliband, tried to fight the campaign largely on the same economic territory. He, and the shadow Chancellor Ed Balls, attempted to counter the Conservatives’ economic commitments with ones of their own: on zero-hours employment; on cancelling non-dom status; by promising no extra borrowing. The leadership, however, were not as single-minded as the Conservatives, talking about Labour’s commitment to young people, to the disabled, on crime and justice, and on the NHS. Neither were Labour candidates as disciplined on Twitter as their Conservative counterparts, tweeting about subjects other than the economy (44%) such as health (25%).

The press were also far less sympathetic to Labour’s messages on the economy. For each positive front page about Labour there were two negative. ‘Miliband puts clamp-down on zero hours at heart of policy’ *the Financial Times* led with on Wednesday 1 April. The following day *the Daily Mail*’s front page read ‘Red Ed’s Zero Hours Hypocrisy’. Leader columns in the press were harder still on Labour. For every positive leader column there were almost four negative.

Immigration, which was expected to be a leading campaign issue, rarely featured prominently. Even when UKIP’s leader Nigel Farage provoked other challengers on the issue in the televised debate on Thursday 16 April, it did not excite broader discussion. Nor did it when a migrant boat capsized in the Mediterranean days later. Tweets about immigration by Conservative and Labour candidates hardly increased on both occasions.

The negative coverage in the press, of all parties but particularly of Labour, was often highly personal. 52% of political articles in *The Sun* mentioned not just the party but the party leader. Just under half of those in *The Mirror* did the same.

On Twitter, the political agenda – as represented by 3,290 political actors and influencers – mapped surprisingly closely to the agenda on national news sites (as shown by the timelines on pages 46–49). Where there were discrepancies they were often connected to television – Twitter and TV appear to have a symbiotic relationship – or to set piece events; the press tended to be more interested in manifesto launches for example.

Although Twitter did not lead the party or press agenda, it often subverted it. When papers gave a misleading impression of polls, political influencers on Twitter pointed people to the actual results. When the Conservatives announced their ‘right-to-buy’ commitment it was challenged and deconstructed within hours by policy specialists on Twitter. When *the Telegraph* published a letter from 5,000 small businesses supporting the Conservatives, political influencers on Twitter discovered and publicized the news that the letter had been engineered by the Conservatives. They then helped orchestrate fact-checking of the signatories. When Ed Miliband unveiled his 8-foot ‘pledge stone’ it was mocked and ridiculed by influencers on Twitter.

This appeared to be where Twitter was at its most powerful in this election, in critiquing and puncturing the claims of political parties and mainstream media. This was not, however, how most candidates used it. Most simply used Twitter as a means to communicate their parties’ core messages rather than as a means of dialogue or to develop a personal following.

The SNP played a critical role throughout the campaign, though Nicola Sturgeon came to particular prominence following the leaders debate on Thursday 2 April. Tweets about the SNP leader amongst actors and influencers leapt forty-fold that day and never returned to their pre-debate level. *The Daily Mail* then led the demonization of Sturgeon with its front page on Saturday 4 April – ‘The Most Dangerous Woman in Britain’. 58 of 59

leader columns in the UK national press about the SNP during the official campaign were negative.

As the first UK election where the date was known years in advance, 7 May 2015 was bound to be carefully planned by the parties; and it was. The Conservatives were particularly well prepared and reiterated a series of messages about the economy constantly and repetitively. Labour succeeded in grabbing the agenda on occasion, most notably on non-doms, but found itself always fighting the campaign on Conservative territory.

Towards the end of the campaign national news sites and influencers on Twitter became focused on the likelihood of a hung parliament, the various potential coalitions this could lead to, and the role of the SNP. Over the final ten days there were over 400 articles referring to polling companies on national news sites.

Yet in the end the result was far simpler. The Conservatives won a majority and formed the new government. Few in the press or on Twitter predicted such an outcome before 7 May.

ENDNOTES AND FURTHER RESEARCH

All the data for the Election Unspun weekly analyses and the four specials can be found online at electionunspun.net

We will be publishing further research examining who set the agenda for the 2015 UK election campaign that will look in more depth at the communication of specific issues and the dynamics of the relationship between the Parties, mainstream media and Twitter.

For further analysis of media coverage see the work of Cardiff University (JOMEC), Bournemouth University,' and the Loughborough University General Election 2015 study.

If you would like to get in touch regarding this or future research please contact Martin Moore at martin.j.moore@kcl.ac.uk